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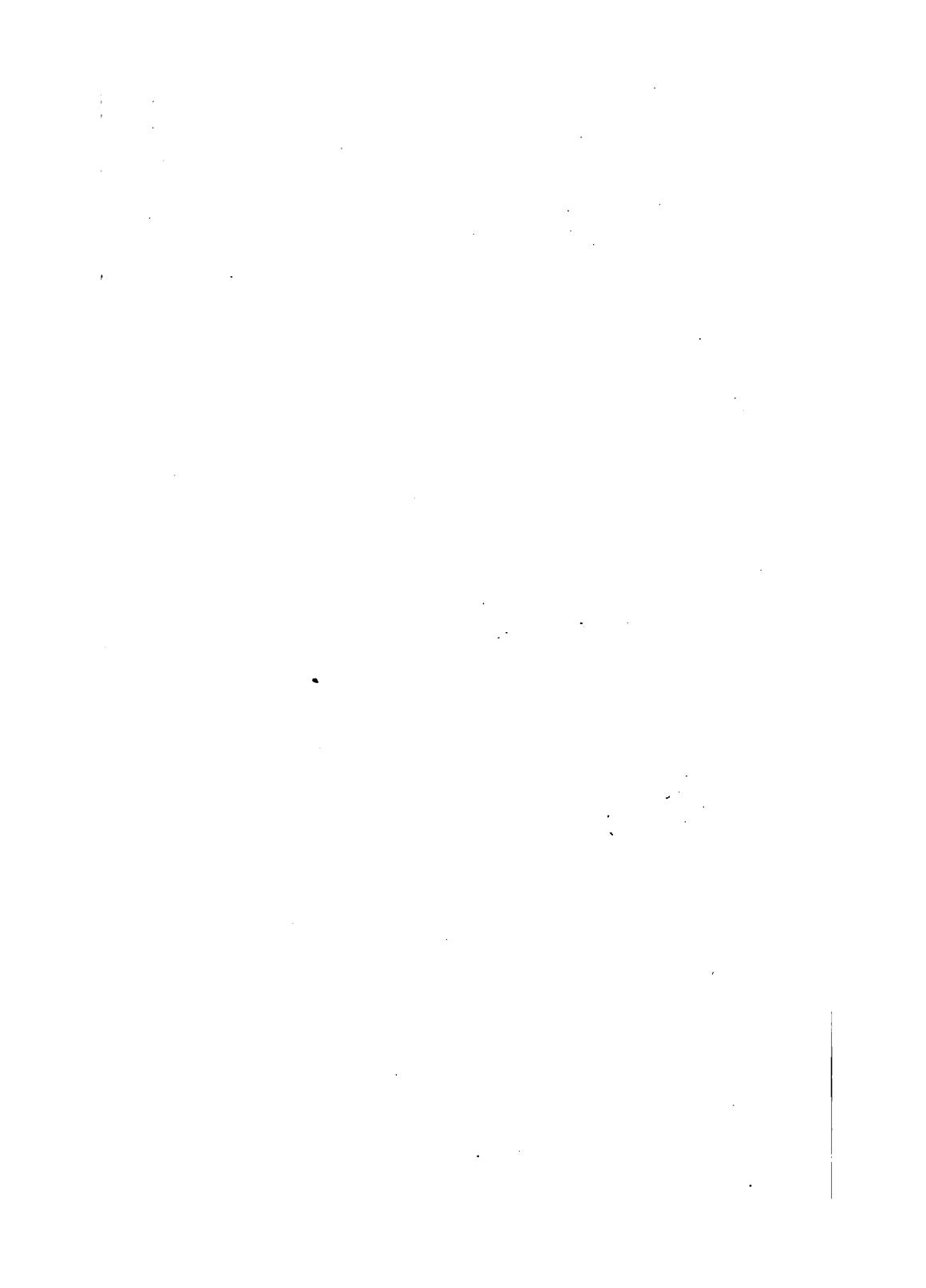


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HOLLOWHILL FARM.



HOLLOWHILL FARM.

A Novel.

BY

JOHN EDWARDSON.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.



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HOLLOWHILL FARM.

CHAPTER I.

A CURTAIN LECTURE.



CURTAIN lecture, in its strict integrity, should proceed from wedded lips. This has been, from time immemorial, the accepted signification of the above term.

A curtain lecture. Oh fearful sound! redolent of “I told you how it would be, but you never mind a word I say;” “there is no use in talking;” “enough to try the patience of Job;” “you must do it to provoke me;” with many another polite in-

timation that, in the eyes of your best friend, you are little better than an idiot.

A curtain lecture. Woe is me! my very flesh creeps as I pronounce the awful words. Escape is impossible; you must hear all she has to say. Yes, madam, I say "she" advisedly; for it is well known that curtain lectures always come from the feminine side of the bed. Men never lecture, they only storm and snore—the latter being, by far, the greater infliction.

So great an infliction do I consider *bonâ fide* snoring, that I think no one should be compelled to put up with it. I am not speaking of an occasional snort, or an intermittent snuffle, but a regular, downright, incessant snore; which I do maintain should certainly be in the cruelty schedule; and I confess that I have been on the look-out for a snoring case in the Divorce Court for some time past, and am

quite surprised that the judge in probate has never, as yet, had one before him.

There can be no doubt as to the dreadful cruelty attendant on snoring: ask any one. Now which had you rather, madam, have your ears boxed occasionally; have your hair cut off; be locked up in your room; have your petticoats tied round your ankles; or be snored at nightly, weekly, monthly, and yearly?

There can be but one answer. But this chapter is not dedicated to snoring; I must not allow my antipathies to clash; let me cleave to my first hate.

Now the matrimonial curtain lecture is a sacred thing. I would no more dream of revealing my experiences in those interesting and unique discoveries, than a conscientious Roman Catholic priest would dream of betraying the secrets of the confessional.

But the curtain lecture which Cecil delivered to Grace was a totally different affair altogether; I feel that I betray no confidence, I violate no secrecy by detailing the substance of her lecture; no, not though I give it you word for word; which, upon second thoughts, I think I will do. In the first place, however, we must have Grace's confession; for until that is made Cecil has not wherewithal to lecture upon.

Grace loquitur: "I cannot tell you, Cecil, when first, or how often Charley asked me to be his wife: certainly as long ago as when I was twelve years old; whilst I was such a child that of course, it all meant nothing, and I never thought of what he said for half an hour after he had said it. But a few weeks before he went abroad, when I was fifteen, you know, he repeated the same thing; and although I did not attach any importance to what he said, I remem-

ber well that I felt a flutter at my heart that I had never felt before; and I blushed when he kissed me as he had never kissed me before; still I thought nothing of it—I was too young, I suppose, to understand my own feelings. You remember the day he went away, and his taking leave of us in the drawing-room at the Rookery?"

"Yes," said Cecil, "I remember it perfectly."

Grace hesitated a moment and then continued—

"I saw him again after that, but quite accidentally. I was going through the hall on the way to my own room, when, to my surprise, for I really thought he was gone, he called to me from the dining-room; I went to him, and he snatched me to his breast and kissed me. Oh Cecil! so violently, so impetuously, that I felt frightened. 'Mind, Grace, you are to be my wife when I come back,' he said,

and in another moment he was really gone."

"Why didn't you tell me of this, Grace?" asked Cecil.

"Because I did not think of it; besides, what was there to tell? that Charley had kissed me? You had seen him do that often enough; I have seen him kiss you often enough too."

"Not after I was fifteen, I am sure," said Cecil.

"I don't know how old you were, but I know he used to kiss us when he went to school, and when he came back, and several times during the holidays besides; and I remember your boxing his ears one day, because he stole behind you when you were writing, and gave you a kiss; that was during his Oxford vacation; you were more than fifteen then, Cecil."

Cecil laughed; she recollected the cir-

cumstance perfectly, and also Charley's astonishment and anger at the box on the ear which he received. "Yes," she said, "I was more than fifteen then; and he was very impertinent, as I told him at the time. for I had forbidden him taking that liberty, and had begged that the silly habit of kissing us, whenever he went away or came back, might be discontinued. He never tried it again. But now go on, Grace, with your explanations, for I do not yet see a sufficient reason for your strange behaviour at dinner to-day."

"Perhaps you never will," said Grace, piteously. "It is very difficult for me to explain my feelings, but I will try. Very soon after Charley had gone away Mr. Painter began to—to—what shall I call it? —show me attentions, I suppose, although I don't mean in the least that he made love to me, I was too young for that, but he

lent me books and music, and talked to me often, just as anyone would talk to a school-girl, and, of course, I liked him, he was so kind and good-natured. Well, this sort of thing continued until about two months ago when, from his manner, it struck me suddenly one day that—that——”

“ That he was making love to you,” suggested Cecil. “ Well, what then?”

“ Well, then I felt uncomfortable; for I did not want to marry him, and I tried to avoid being alone with him which he evidently saw and understood, for his visits here became much less frequent. But when, after a few weeks of absence, he came again, my manner was, I know, kinder to him than usual; I thought it so good of him to continue sending me books and music, notwithstanding my coldness, which I saw had hurt his feelings. Well, of course my kind reception encouraged him,

and I had not the heart to repel him again; besides, I really liked him better and better every day, and so at last he proposed and I accepted him."

"Did no thought of Charley interfere?" said Cecil; "and if not, why did it to-day?"

"Many times since Charley left have I thought of his last farewell, and wondered whether he had meant anything—anything more than nonsense, you know, Cecil—at last I decided that he did *not* mean anything worth thinking about."

"How did you arrive at that conclusion, dear, and why did you come to a diametrically opposite one to-day?"

"Why, you know, Cecil, I am older now than I was when Charley behaved so—so oddly; and besides, I have had some experience since then in—in that sort of thing; and I know that people don't make love in that kind of way."

“People?” said Cecil.

“Well, I mean Mr. Painter, of course, only I said ‘people’ because I did not want to say his name straight out. He behaved quite differently from Charley; *he* didn’t snatch hold of me, kiss me like a madman, ask me to be his wife, and rush out of the room; he always seemed half afraid of me, and was so modest and retiring; and as for kissing me, he never attempted such a thing till he had proposed (on his knees, too), and I had accepted him, and then he only kissed my hand—at first. So, of course, I thought that Charley’s nonsense meant nothing, particularly when I remembered how young I was when it happened. It was not likely that he would be really in love with a girl not much more than fifteen.”

“I quite understand all that,” said Cecil; “but what I do *not* understand is your be-

haviour to-day, which entirely contradicts everything you have said about your indifference towards each other; and yet you had never met since that time when, as you justly observe, you were too young for any one to think of you seriously as a wife. Surely you did not correspond with him!"

"Oh, no, no! how can you think me so deceitful, Cecil? You must have lost all confidence in me, even to suppose such a thing; perhaps you don't believe a word I am saying, in that case there is no use in my going on."

Cecil apologized, the thought had occurred to her and she had given it utterance, but in her heart she knew that her sister was incapable of such deceit.

Thus reassured, Grace continued—

"The instant I entered the parlour to-day Charley caught me in his arms, kissed me in the same violent manner he had done

in the dining-room at the Rookery, and said, ‘Grace I have come back to claim you as my bride.’ I could not prevent his doing it, Cecil—indeed, indeed I could not; but I pushed him away as soon as possible, and said, ‘Oh, Charley, you must not do that!’ Then he seized my hands, and said, ‘Is it true then that you are engaged to be married? tell me—tell me!’ and then you came in, Cecil, and no wonder you were astonished at my confusion, for I know I was crimson with surprise and fright—and—and other feelings.”

“What other feelings, Grace?”

Luckily for Grace the long, attenuated rushlight had “guttered” down as usual, and shone but dimly through the tall perforated tin case in which it stood, rendering the flush which suffused her face barely discernible.

“Oh, Cecil,” she whispered, “I am so

ashamed of myself, but I could not help feeling as I did; it is this that makes me so miserable."

Cecil passed her arm round her sister's neck and drew her towards her. "I think I know what you would say, dearest Grace, that you were not so angry with Charley as you ought to have been, is it not so?"

"Yes," replied Grace, in a tone scarcely audible. "Yes, although I was frightened at Charley's vehemence, still my heart seemed to respond to his embrace, and a strange, new sort of feeling, suddenly sprang up within me. Oh, Cecil, do not hate me! but I fear—I am afraid I love him better than Mr. Painter."

Grace ceased, and hiding her face on her sister's bosom, lay in trembling and tearful expectation of the manner in which this dreadful confession would be received.

Cecil was silent for some little time; she

was thinking over all she had heard. She implicitly believed Grace's story. She could well understand that the germ of love had been sown in her heart when she was too young to recognise its true character, that it had lain dormant for a time, and that it had suddenly sprung up into life at the sight—the touch of him who had sown it. But this solution of the truth did not in any way lessen the difficulty; on the contrary, it increased it. If Grace *really* loved Charley Dimdale—but perhaps, after all, it was only a childish fancy. She was still so young, and Charley was so handsome, and so demonstrative in his affection, whilst Mr. Painter, she suspected was by no means a passionate lover.

“Cecil, speak to me,” murmured Grace; “what can I do?—what can I do?”

Acting upon her hopes more than upon her belief, Cecil began: “My dearest Grace,

you must never lose sight of this fact, that you are engaged to Mr. Painter. *That* precludes the possibility of your liking any one else so well as you like him, you know. Stop a moment, Grace, I know what you would say, 'you like Charley better;' you think you do just now, perhaps. You have known him and liked him ever since you have known and liked anything; and the surprise, the pleasure of seeing him after his long absence, have, no doubt, increased your affection for him. This is quite natural; one's heart always seems to warm towards a friend under such circumstances more than at any other time; every kindly feeling is uppermost to welcome him back again. Charley was very wrong in behaving as he did, knowing you to be engaged, and doubtless it confused and agitated you a good deal, but you *must* overrate your feelings for him when you

say you like him better than Mr. Painter."

Grace shook her head. She was not to be blinded by Cecil's sophistry: she knew better, she knew by the flutter of her heart when she thought of the scene in the parlour, that what she felt for Charley Dimdale was love, real *bona fide* love.

"No, Cecil," she said; "I do *not* over-rate my feelings; it is useless trying to deceive either myself or you."

"Well, well," replied Cecil, "I will not dispute the point at present; nay, more, I will allow, for the sake of argument (though ~~I~~ I by no means believe it, mind), that you *do* like Charley better than you like Mr. Painter or any one else; still your attachment would be a most unfortunate one, even supposing that you were entirely free, which you are not; because you never

could marry Charley; you *must* know that, Grace."

"Never could marry Charley!" repeated Grace; "why not?"

"My dear Grace, how can you ask such a question? Surely you cannot but see that it would be the most odious piece of ingratitude towards Lady Jane, to whom we owe everything, if you were to marry her only son. The heir to fifteen thousand a year, and a Baronet, has a right to look much higher for a wife than to the daughter of a Kentish yeoman——"

"I—I thought we were ladies," stammered the poor girl, who was astounded at this new view of the case.

"We are ladies by education, but not by birth," replied Cecil, with her usual outspoken truthfulness. "And that we are so is entirely owing to Lady Jane's kindness and liberality. Had it not been for her

affection and care, our manners and our speech would have been the same as those of our cousin Jane Danger, for after all we are but farmer's daughters, you know."

"A gentleman farmer, Cecil. Remember that papa was always called a 'gentleman farmer,' I am certain."

"Yes, I know he was, and great nonsense I always thought it. A gentleman farmer is, in my opinion, a gentleman who farms for his amusement, not a farmer who plays the gentleman. But, however, never mind that now. You know as well as I do, that neither by birth nor by social position are we entitled to rank with the ladies of the land. Lady Jane would, of course, be terribly disappointed were her son to marry a girl of what is called 'no family'—the creature of her bounty; one whom, out of regard for her mother, she had brought up and educated, and treated so

kindly, so liberally, so affectionately. Oh, Grace! surely you must see all this as plainly as I do?"

There was no response for a few moments. Grace was swallowing her rising tears. Presently she spoke.

"I am not thinking of marrying him. I am engaged to Mr. Painter, and I suppose I must, of course, keep to my engagement; but—but—if things had been different, I don't see why Lady Jane should have objected to Charley's marrying me. She always has treated us like daughters, and Charley always treated us like sisters, as his equals, as—"

"Really, Grace," cried Cecil, "I cannot bear to hear you talk such nonsense. Because Lady Jane, out of the warmth of her loving heart, and from a high sense of delicacy and regard to our feelings, forbore to remind us of our de-

pendent situation either by word or deed, you would repay her by entrapping her only son into a marriage beneath him. I tell you that it would be detestable, abominable ingratitude. Everybody would cry shame on us, and everybody would be right."

"Oh, Cecil! I never thought of entrapping him. How can you say such harsh things?" sobbed Grace.

But Cecil had no mercy.

"You have thought of falling in love with him, Grace; and pray to what is that to lead if not to marriage?"

This was a puzzling question. Falling in love should lead to marriage—Grace had wit enough to see this. She could not deny her love, so she muttered, "I could not help it."

This simple answer was so obviously the truth, that Cecil in her turn was

puzzled. It was all very well to say she ought not to have fallen in love with Charley Dimdale and that she must not think of marrying him; neither of these assertions altered the fact that she *was* in love with him, and with this fact and its consequences Cecil still had to deal. She was roused from her reverie by Grace saying, in an injured tone—

“ You need not be afraid of my disgracing you, Cecil; I have made up my mind to marry Mr. Painter, and be miserable for the rest of my life.”

Cecil stared in astonishment. “ Marry Mr. Painter!” she said, almost angrily; “ and you have yourself owned that you like another man better!”

“ But he need never know it—shall never know it. I thought you wished me to marry Mr. Painter? You are so hard to please.”

“ Hard to please!” exclaimed Cecil, more

and more astonished. “Gracious! what do you mean? You surely do not mean to marry one man and love another! What are you thinking of, Grace? You cannot know what you are saying.”

“Yes, I do, and I know that it would be very hard to do as I say, still I could do it, and I *would* do it sooner than you should say that I want to entrap Charley, which is a great shame, because I never did try anything of the sort; I am as much above doing such a thing as you are yourself, Cecil.”

Having delivered herself of the above dignified exposition of her sentiments, Grace sat up in the bed and looked proudly at Cecil for the approbation she expected, and, in her own opinion, deserved.

What could a woman do more than offer up her happiness for life upon the shrine of duty?

“Yes,” she said, “I am willing to sacrifice myself for the good of those who are dearest to me; I will marry Mr. Painter, though my heart should break as I pronounce the fatal vows. Then all would be satisfied—Lady Jane—you—and Charley, who might marry a duchess, if he chose.”

The bare supposition of Charley marrying a duchess overcame her, and she wept audibly. But even her grief failed to soften Cecil’s heart, which seemed to Grace that night hard as the nether millstone.

“Grace,” she said, regardless of her tears, “you do not think of what you are saying, or you would not give utterance to such words. No woman can love one man and marry another—that is, no woman worthy of the name. It is *that* which makes the difficulty;—you cannot marry Charley because—but I have told you why—and you

cannot marry Mr. Painter because you like Charley best. I know not how to help you."

Even Grace's meek spirit rose up in rebellion at these repeated rebuffs. She had, by the greatest exertion of her mental powers, wound herself up to the performance of an act of heroism. She had solemnly announced her willingness and her intention to sacrifice herself upon the shrine of duty, and instead of receiving the praise she so justly merited, the applause she so richly deserved and had so hardly earned, she was told that she did not know what she was talking about; nay, more, worse than that even, that her purposed act of self-immolation was unwomanly: no wonder, I say, that the meek-minded Grace should fire up at such unmerited contumely.

"I *do* know what I am saying, Cecil," exclaimed the unappreciated heroine; "and when I offer to give up my own feelings out of consideration for the feelings of

others—to sacrifice my own happiness to insure the happiness of others—I must say I think it very unkind, very unjust to tell me that I am unwomanly, and that I don't know what I am saying."

More tears followed this outburst, and the little spark of anger which had flickered for a moment in Cecil's breast was again quenched.

"Dearest Grace," she said, drawing her sister tenderly towards her, "whose happiness do you think you would insure by what you call sacrificing yourself? Certainly not Mr. Painter's—his happiness would scarcely be insured by marrying a woman who did not love him. Certainly not mine; I shudder even now, only to hear you speak of doing so wicked a thing, and if——"

"So wicked a thing! Cecil, what *can* you mean?" interrupted Grace. "I am sure I

have always heard that such a self-sacrifice as I contemplate making, is the most praiseworthy and meritorious action one can perform—such a total abnegation of self, you know."

"'Heard,' Grace! when or where did you ever hear anything of the sort?"

Grace pondered. "Why, it was only the other day," she said, triumphantly, "that I read of a young lady who was desperately in love with a man, and he was desperately in love with her, and yet she agreed to give up the man she loved, and marry another whom she hated—which was more meritorious than in my case, for I don't hate Mr. Painter at all. She agreed to do this to save her father from ruin, he being in the power of the man whom she hated. There, Cecil! what do you say to that?—a splendid instance of devotion and self-denial, I call it."

"A most wicked resolve, I call it," replied the inexorable Cecil.

"A wicked resolve! Do you say that to tease me? You cannot be in earnest, Cecil; *wicked* to sacrifice herself to save her father from ruin!"

"Had it been to save her father from the gallows, it would have been equally wicked, Grace; we are not to do evil that good may come of it. That 'the end justifies the means,' is the Roman Catholic creed, not ours—God forbid it ever should be ours."

"But, Cecil, I do not understand how it can be wrong to give up one's own happiness for the sake of another, and that other one's father or one's sister. How can that be wicked?"

"Grace," said Cecil, solemnly, "is it not wicked to stand before the altar of *God* with a lie in one's mouth?"

“Oh, Cecil! you say such dreadful things!” cried Grace, quite shocked.

“Have you ever read the marriage ceremony, Grace?”

“No,—I don’t know—yes, I believe.”

“But of course you have,” continued Cecil. “Well, do you not remember what you promise in that sacred, that holy ceremony? Do you not promise to love, honour, and cherish him in sickness and in health, and, *forsaking all other*, to keep only unto him so long as you both shall live? That promise is to be kept in the spirit as well as in the letter. How can you take that vow upon you when you love another man better than your husband? Is that *forsaking all other*? No sophistry can palliate, no circumstance can justify so great a sin. I too have read of heroines who have done such things and have been extolled to the skies for

their self-sacrifice—I always thought they deserved to be whipped instead of worshipped. But it is only heroines of romance, I suppose, who ever perform such feats. Grace, dearest, surely you must now see how wicked it would be to do this?"

"Yes," murmured Grace, in a repentant and humble tone.

Cecil kissed her tenderly. "Then go to sleep, darling," she said; "we will talk no more to-night."





CHAPTER II.

HOW MR. PAINTER TAKES THINGS EASY, AND DAME DOROTHY DOES NOT.

WHAT has become of Colonel Jacob Dimdale? We thought he was the hero of the story, and have been expecting every moment to see him emerge from the lumber-room with renewed strength and vigour, ready to dare and to do, after the manner of orthodox heroes; who, of course, always scramble out of all difficulties, escape all dangers, fatten where common men would starve, and never die. We know all that quite well, and were not under the slightest alarm lest he should fall into Mr. Twig-

gem's clutches; neither did we feel the smallest anxiety with regard to his fainting fit: we were not taken in by either of those incidents, although doubtless you thought we were, and indeed we are not at all anxious for his personal safety at present; we only desire just to hint to you that it is time your hero should make his appearance again, that is all.

To this, apparently most reasonable hint, I reply—that if you were not taken in touching the well-doing of Colonel Dimdale, you were in supposing him to be “the hero of my story.” I would scorn to have such a hero! and I would scorn to treat a hero as I have treated him.

No; Colonel Jacob Dimdale is simply the medium through whose agency the principal characters and their performances are introduced and described. But for him Cecil would never have descended

the face of the cliff during that fierce snowstorm you wot of; but for him, Rupert would not have drank his sherry and smoked his pipe in the back parlour of the Jolly Mariners; but for him, Robert Cuff would not have received a slap in the face from Katherine Doyle, or a black eye from Tom Nodder. In short, but for him, this picture could not have been painted. I float my characters into the stream of narrative upon the shoulders of Colonel Dimdale, as a painter floats his colours on to his canvas, upon the bosom of linseed oil. Both the oil and the Colonel are mediums—nothing more. So soon as the colours are upon the canvas, the artist troubles himself no longer about the oil—it has done its part, and the sooner it dries up the better: and thus your interest in the Colonel (if you ever had any) may dry up as soon as you please. His health

is better, his spirits are better, and his conscience more at ease; he is still in the lumber-room, and occupies his time chiefly in writing, and in looking over papers and memoranda. With the result of this employment you will be made acquainted at the proper time. I might tell you now without any detriment to my story, but I prefer keeping you in suspense, principally, if not entirely, because I have the power to do so. This is the principle upon which all great men act; they make themselves disagreeable because they can do so with impunity; it shows their power and importance.

Therefore Secretaries of State keep inferior mortals, who come on important business, waiting in ante-rooms, whilst they chat with a noble friend about the vintage of '45 and the Derby of '66.

Therefore Colonels of regiments bully

and bluster: therefore—but I need not overwhelm you with examples of an acknowledged fact, as well known to you as to me.

I am a great man now, because I have you in my power; when this story is finished I shall be a very little man indeed, entirely in *your* power. You, the discerning public, can at your will either make or mar me. I live by the breath of your nostrils; I die without it. Yet, although knowing this full well, I cannot help, whilst you are in my power, having a dig at you. I shall not follow the example of the Colonels, and bully and bluster, because I consider such doings both vulgar and ridiculous. No, I prefer the passive impertinence of the Secretaries. I shall therefore keep you waiting.

When Grace awoke next morning she found Cecil sitting by her side, watching her intently.

“Oh, Cecil! why do you look at me so? You frighten me,” she cried.

Her sister smiled affectionately. “I was trying to discover what you were dreaming about, Gracey; you had a flush on your cheek, a tear in your eye, and a smile on your lip, and I could not make out what it all meant.”

“I was dreaming of our last night’s conversation,” replied Grace, ingenuously; “of Charley and of Mr. Painter; oh, Cecil! what *am* I to do?”

“You were dreaming more of Charley than of Mr. Painter,” said Cecil, disregarding her question.

Grace blushed and acknowledged the truth of her sister’s divining.

“Well then, Gracey dear, you must tell Mr. Painter the true state of the case.”

Grace started up aghast.

“Yes,” continued Cecil, “you must tell

him everything ; or if you object to do so yourself, I will tell him for you."

Grace certainly did object, and she said as much ; whereupon it was decided that Cecil should take upon herself the disagreeable part of informing poor Mr. Painter (he was poor Mr. Painter now) that Grace had changed her mind. She was also to make the fact known to Aunt Dorothy ; a feat which Grace positively declined attempting ; she would sooner face Mr. Painter himself than Aunt Dorothy, and she begged and entreated Cecil not to betray to her Aunt her feelings towards Charley Dimdale. But Cecil was firm on that point, she must tell Aunt Dorothy the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth. In short, how could she help it ? Aunt Dorothy would be sure to ask why Grace refused to marry Mr. Painter, and what reason could be given ?

“Cecil,” said Grace, when all these weighty matters were finally arranged, “I am happier now than I was last night when I had determined to marry Mr. Painter, for although I thought I was doing right, I was wretched. Now I am more frightened than anything else.”

“Do you remember ‘The Heart of Midlothian,’ Grace?”

“Yes, and I know what you are going to say, Cecil—Jeanie Deans would not tell a lie to save her sister’s life. It is strange, but I thought of that last night before I went to sleep, and I felt so thankful to you for all you had said. But no one writes like Walter Scott now. Why do people fill their books with bad morality, and pretend it is good all the time?”

“Because they know no better, Gracey. Human nature is a sealed book to many who write about it; therefore they make sad

mistakes, and, all unconsciously, do much harm. Scott, however, is a glorious exception ; to me, the greatest charm of his writings has always been his truth to nature."

"But do you think then, Cecil, that no girl has ever married one man when she liked another better?"

"Many a girl has done so, I fear," said Cecil. "Bad people do bad things ; that is true to nature, to our fallen nature. But it is *not* true to nature to make a high principled girl do a bad action from what is called a 'good motive.' Jeanie Deans would no more marry Mr. Painter, were she in your place, than she would tell a lie to save her sister's life."

Grace was satisfied, and Cecil, mustering all her resolution, soon after left the room, to break the astounding intelligence of her sister's delinquency to Dame Dorothy and Mr. Painter.

It was fortunate that Cecil had habitually great calmness and self-possession, for her interview with her aunt, and subsequently with Mr. Painter, called forth those inestimable qualities, and tried them too, severely. The news of Grace's defection came like a clap of thunder upon Dame Dorothy. No sooner had she realized the fact, however, that Grace was in love with Charley Dimdale, and for that reason gave up Mr. Painter, than she fairly burst out laughing, angry as she was.

"Why, I never could have thought that Grace was such a fool. I declare she's worse than Jane, who makes love to every man who comes into the house."

In vain Cecil explained that Sir Charles had certainly made love to Grace, and not Grace to him.

"Well, well, it's no matter," replied the incensed dame. "To think that a niece of

mine should ever dream of marrying Sir Charles, or of being in love with him, or he with her, I don't care which it is; it's too ridiculous! And to give up such a nice easy going man as Mr. Painter. Such a good match, too, for a girl without a penny, and all for a piece of foolish vanity, for it's nothing more. Sir Charles meant nothing if he did kiss her as you say. Why, bless my heart! *you* never thought of falling in love with him, Cecil, or fancied him in love with you; but Grace was always more simple minded and frivolous like than you. This comes of making ladies of you girls, not but what I'm glad of that and proud of it, and of you. I'm not envious because your manners and your speech and your learning *are* all superior to me and mine, but I *do* say this, that Lady Jane should have made a difference between you and her own children, and then this

piece of foolery would never have happened."

"Lady Jane did not like to hurt our feelings, Aunt Dorothy; it was kindly meant," said Cecil, who in her heart agreed with her Aunt's observations, but could not bear to hear Lady Jane blamed.

"Hurt your fiddlesticks!" replied the dame, contemptuously. "I *am* surprised to hear *you* talk such nonsense, Cecil. Why should it have hurt your feelings, I should be glad to know? I declare I'm sick to death of the word. Jane is allus talking of her feelings, and Grace too. One would think that the girls of the present day were made up altogether of feelings; they've no firmness nor courage, nor yet much sense as I can see, but they are brimful of feelings. Bless your heart! such beautiful, delicate, fine feelings! and what good do they ever do any one? They get you into

scrapes, but they never get you out of them, as ever I heard of. I am surprised at you, Cecil, that I really am!"

There was no arguing with Dame Dorothy ; the torrent of her eloquence bore down all opposition. But in the present instance she was substantially in the right, which, to say the truth, was generally the case.

Cecil, not being able openly to defend Lady Jane's conduct, held her peace, contenting herself by beating, with her well-poised foot upon the carpet, that popular military air, in which the father of mischief is supposed to take especial delight.

"For mercy's sake, Cecil, leave off that everlasting tap, tap, tap ; it fidgets me to death."

"I beg your pardon, aunt," said Cecil, instantly desisting, and adding, thoughtfully, "I am afraid Lady Jane will be dreadfully

annoyed and disappointed when she hears of this unfortunate affair."

"It serves her right—it really does. Not but what I am as sorry as you are that anything should vex her. She has always been a kind friend to our family, and I love and respect her, as good right I have, but it does serve her right for all that. What could she expect with two handsome girls and a handsome boy brought up together, and they no relations, but that some foolery of this sort would happen? But perhaps, Cecil, we may keep it from her; I wouldn't vex her if I could help it, God knows I wouldn't."

"*We* might keep our secret perhaps; but depend upon it, Sir Charles will not keep his. I should not be surprised if he has told Lady Jane already, and asked her consent to his marriage with Grace."

Dame Dorothy looked earnestly at Cecil.

It was not like her to joke on serious subjects, but to the dame's apprehension such an idea as Cecil had broached, could not be meant in earnest. There were no symptoms, however, of jocularity on Cecil's sad and thoughtful countenance, and the dame's anger was rekindled beyond passive endurance. She arose in great wrath.

"There, there! don't say another word, Cecil," she exclaimed, as she walked hastily towards the door. "You know Sir Charles Dimdale better than I do; but all I can say is, if he has done as you suppose, why he's the biggest fool of the lot, that's what he is."

Dame Dorothy flounced out of the room, muttering as she hurried on her way to the kitchen, "a pretty face and a genteel manner is bait enough to catch a'most any man—dear heart! what gabies men are, to be sure!"

What a comfort it is to be able to do as one likes, if only for half an hour. We all have peculiar habits more or less absurd, more or less objectionable, but which, because they *are* habits, we are fond of, or at all events, being accustomed to them, we don't like their being interfered with, especially as they probably are not worth making a fuss about. One man perhaps has a habit of "sniffing," more particularly when occupied in any mental exercise; another clears his throat more frequently than is deemed necessary by his companions; another winks everlastingly; another twitches up his nose, and makes faces at you; another says "eh?" whenever you speak to him, although he hears you perfectly. But I might go on *ad infinitum*, these little evil habits are innumerable, and I might add, inseparable from our great evil nature. I do not defend them; on the contrary, I

condemn them—in others. We all do that of course. But still I maintain that it is a comfort to be able to sniff and sneeze with impunity, sometimes, without any one exclaiming, “For goodness sake, *my dear*, do not go on sniffing so.”

And I have no doubt Cecil thoroughly enjoyed the quarter of an hour she spent alone in the little parlour, beating an uninterrupted devil’s tattoo, after Dame Dorothy had left her.

Punctually as the cuckoo clock said or sung eleven, did Mr. Painter present himself at Hollowhill. He was very nervous as Catherine ushered him into the room, and started on seeing Cecil, instead of Grace, awaiting him.

“I have a long story to tell you, Mr. Painter,” were the first words after the morning salutation; “and a strange story, and one that perhaps you would find it

difficult to believe, did I not assure you that it is true as it is strange."

Mr. Painter bowed politely, but made no reply. Cecil began her painful and disagreeable task. She told him everything. It took a long time, for she tried to soften her sister's refusal as much as possible, as well as to excuse her conduct. She strove hard to convince Mr. Painter that Grace was more sinned against than sinning, and apparently she succeeded beyond her expectations. During the whole time she was speaking, he sat with folded arms, listening intently. He asked no question, and made no remark until she had finished; he then said, in a gentle tone without the slightest tinge of annoyance or surprise—

"I was prepared, in great measure, for this, Cecil. I have, as you may well imagine, been pondering long and earnestly on the

cause of the sudden change in your sister's manner and behaviour to me yesterday. For a time I could not catch a ray of light to guide me, when suddenly Sir Charles Dimdale's handsome face presented itself to my memory, and all was plain sailing. 'Poor Grace!' I said, 'she fancies herself in love with him, I'll be bound, and as she can't very well be in love with two men at once, and happens to be engaged to me, why, of course she is put out about it. Now I am very fond of Grace, as you know; I love her dearly, and I made up my mind, as I came along this morning, to tell her that I would release her from her promise to me—that is, of course if my suspicions about Sir Charles were correct, for I cannot bear to see her unhappy, poor dear girl! I daresay she has tormented herself to death all night about giving me my congé. So tell her, Cecil, if you please,

what I say, and bid her not fret or worry herself any more."

Cecil was so astonished at Mr. Painter's easy self-possession, that she could do nothing but gaze at him in silent surprise. Bitter revilings or cruel upbraiding she had not expected—she knew his kind and generous nature too well to fear reproaches or accusations from him. But a touching remonstrance or two, an earnest appeal to Grace's plighted word, a desire to see her, to learn his fate from her own lips, or, failing all else, a sorrowful acquiescence in her decision, she certainly had looked for. But Mr. Painter neither mourned nor remonstrated, nor expressed the slightest wish to see Grace: he simply set her free. It was certainly most extraordinary. Mr. Painter perceived Cecil's embarrassment, and taking her hand and smiling kindly, he said—

" You are not sure whether I am in

my senses or not. If I am, you despise me for my indifference to a blow that ought to have struck me to the earth with grief and despair. Is it not so?"

"I own I am surprised at the quiet way in which you have taken the matter. Your affection for Grace cannot be so great as I imagined it to be," replied Cecil, indignant at his apparent indifference.

"Oh yes, it is; my love for Grace is probably greater than you ever thought it. I should be quite miserable enough to please even you, if I thought my engagement with her was really at an end; but I think nothing of the sort—on the contrary I feel sure that she will be my wife some day or other, and I love her too well to tease her. This astonishes you more than ever; now Cecil, please to listen to me. I am a good deal older than you, and although I am not so clever, I know human nature much

better than you do. Sir Charles Dimdale and Grace fancy themselves in love with each other, *are* in love with each other if you insist upon it, but in that sort of thoughtless, headstrong, fiery way, peculiar to very young people, which soon burns itself out. I don't call that love, I call it fancy—a furious fancy if you will, but still a fancy. All that you have told me, confirms me in my opinion, Cecil. His habit of calling her his little wife when they were both mere children, the tender farewell when he went abroad, his admiration of her beauty when he returned, and I might add her admiration of his beauty—for he *is* a monstrous good-looking fellow—all these prove to me that the feeling—call it what you will—which has sprung up and blazed forth so suddenly, is not made of stuff stern enough to stand the wear and tear of real life. It would suit a story-book admi-

rably, but it is a fish out of water upon the shore of this matter-of-fact world; it will plunge and rage and lash itself into fury like a stranded whale, and then it will gasp and die. I am not a bit afraid of it; as long as I keep out of the way of its tail I am safe enough, and as soon as it is dead, I step in and secure the prize, you know."

Cecil could not help laughing. "Well, I never saw anyone take things so coolly as you do," she said; "and yet I really do believe that you love Grace, and what is more, I agree with a great deal that you say; though I little suspected that you would see the matter in so practical a light —just at present at all events."

"My dear Cecil, I own it would have been far more romantic and interesting if I had torn my hair and talked nonsense; but I am past the age of romance, I have had all romance knocked out of me years ago.

I had plenty of it once, enough to capsize a frigate—and it did nearly capsize me, long, long ago. But that is nothing to the purpose. I now know better than to rave and storm when difficulties arise. I try to look them steadily in the face, and to argue coolly; it is the better plan, believe me. Last night, when I parted from Grace, I was miserable; her coldness and altered behaviour quite upset me; I could not account for it: I was indeed truly wretched. Of course one cannot be calm and reasonable all at once upon such trying occasions, but one can after a while, if one only goes the right way to work. You will understand this, Cecil, some day, and appreciate it, though at present you only laugh at it."

Cecil assured him, and with truth, that she both understood and appreciated his calm reasoning powers; nevertheless she wondered at them.

“Ah! the Admiralty taught me the art of self-government. I was, when a youth, as hot-headed and impetuous as Charley Dimdale himself, not to say more so, and my mistress was ‘a ship.’ I loved my profession, and the height of my ambition was to get the command of a dashing frigate. I thought that the length and nature of my services—for I had seen a good deal of fighting—entitled me to promotion; but the Lords of the Admiralty thought otherwise. It was very galling to see Lord A. B., the Honourable C. D., and Sir E. F. promoted over my head; and I fumed, fretted, and remonstrated at what I considered the injustice done me. Of course no notice was taken of my complaints, until, wearied out and disgusted by my bad treatment, I sent an angry letter to the secretary, saying, that ‘as it was clear that an aristocratic pedigree was essential

to promotion in the Navy, I thought it most unfair that the fact was not one of the Articles of War; that every man might know what he had to expect if he entered the service. This intemperate, though true criticism upon their Lordships' habit of conducting naval matters, put an extinguisher for life on my chance of promotion. I never was afloat after that; I would not and could not serve under men who were fisticuffing at Rugby and Eton whilst I was fighting my country's battles in both hemispheres."

"What a shame!" said Cecil, her face glowing with indignation. "I cannot think how men can do such things! Great men too, as they are called; but very, very little men indeed, I consider them. There is something so mean, so pitiful, to my mind, in refusing to anyone the reward he has justly and hardly earned, merely

because he does not belong to the aristocracy. Those who do such things must have low, vulgar minds; however high their rank, or however rich and powerful they may be; they are not deserving the name of gentlemen according to my acceptation of the term."

"My dear Cecil," said Mr. Painter, laughing, "you remind me of myself some fifteen years ago: I used to 'flare up' then, just as you do now. But what's the use of putting oneself into a passion? Depend upon it that never mended any matter."

"I don't care; I *will* be in a passion with such an iniquitous system. And I declare upon my word, that were I a member of the aristocracy, I should be ashamed of being promoted for doing nothing, over the heads of men who have fought and bled as you have. You may not believe me, but I should."

It was impossible not to believe her. Her impassioned countenance was so clearly the index of a lofty spirit—an uncompromising love of justice. How splendid she looked in her just indignation! her classical features lighted up by an enthusiasm which well became her proud bearing.

“Dear Cecil,” said Mr. Painter, pressing her hand kindly, “I quite believe you, and I admire your hatred of wrong and injustice, for I hate them myself. But we cannot upset a bad system by noise and violence: I only upset myself by such demonstrations, as I have told you, and I have learned that in all matters, but more especially in matters of a personal nature, calmness and reason are of more service than passion, however justifiable it may be.”

Cecil returned the kindly pressure, and the haughty, defiant look passed away.

"I should like you for a brother-in-law so much, Mr. Painter," she said. "I never knew you till now, though we have been so long acquainted."

"It is just ten years since I was appointed (thanks to the late Sir Charles Dimdale) revenue-officer on this part of the coast. You were then a little girl, Cecil, and Grace a still smaller girl; what lovely children you were! Do you know that I was in love with you before I was in love with Grace?"

Cecil laughingly replied in the negative.

"I was, though—it is perfectly true. When you were about sixteen, I had made up my mind to marry you if I could win you. It was on your account that I came here so often—it was for you I brought the music and books; when suddenly I discovered that you would not suit me."

“I never knew so odd a person as you are, Mr. Painter. What *do* you mean?”

“I found out that you were too clever for me: I should have had to look up to you, instead of you looking up to me, and that would never have done.”

“Oh, Mr. Painter! I am sure I don’t know half as much as you do; I wish I did.”

“No, my dear Cecil, you don’t *know* as much, because you are younger than I am, and have not read so many books; but your natural talent is far greater. Well, I then turned my thoughts on Grace, and I have never turned them off since that time. What do you think Lady Jane will say to this business?”

“She will refuse her consent, of course,” replied Cecil, “and then time will stand your friend; indeed, Grace cannot marry Sir Charles Dimsdale—she is quite aware of

that; but as long as she likes him best, she cannot marry any one else”

“I am sorry for that,” said Mr. Painter, musingly.

“Sorry for what?” asked Cecil, for she did not understand him.

“Sorry that Lady Jane will refuse her consent,” replied he.

“Why?” said Cecil, more and more astonished at her strange companion.

“Because, my dear Cecil, their sort of love feeds on opposition; it would soon die a natural death if allowed to run smoothly on. A fanciful passion is like water that has been forced up above its proper level: let it alone, and it will soon run off and leave a dry bed behind it. But I wont take up any more of your time; give my love to Grace, and tell her not to fret. Good day.” He was gone.



CHAPTER III.

A SPOILT CHILD.

HE sisters were engaged canvassing the merits and demerits of Mr. Painter's philosophy, when Larry Doyle made his appearance at the door, with a note from Lady Jane. It was to Cecil, and ran thus:—

“MY DEAR CECIL,—Come to me immediately; I have sent Doyle and the pony-carriage for you.

“Yours,—J. D.”

“There!” said Cecil, showing the letter to Grace. “I told you so—I was certain that Charley would do this. I never knew

such an impetuous, headstrong, spoilt boy in my life!"

"Oh, Cecil!" cried Grace, in alarm, "do you think he has spoken to Lady Jane about—about—"

"He has asked Lady Jane's consent to marry you—that is what he has done; or perhaps, as he is of age, and is not legally bound to ask her leave, he has merely announced to her his intention of making you his wife."

Grace started slightly, which Cecil perceiving, added, "But of course this makes no difference; you could not marry him under any circumstances, as I explained to you last night."

Grace's look of pleasurable surprise vanished, and she murmured, "Of course not."

On Cecil's arrival at the Rookery, she was shown into Lady Jane's boudoir. She

found her ladyship in a state of great excitement.

No sooner had Cecil entered the room, than she was overpowered with questions. “How long had she known of this unfortunate affair? Did Grace, as her son declared, return his affection? What did Cecil herself think of the matter? Perhaps she, as Grace’s sister, might favour the match?”

And then before Cecil had time to reply, Lady Jane burst forth into invectives against herself, for having brought so much misery upon everybody.

“This has been all my doing, Cecil—all my fault; I ought to have foreseen it. It was not possible for Charley to be constantly with you and Grace without attaching himself to one of you. I am only thankful that his choice did not fall on you, Cecil, for I scarcely think I *could* have

refused my consent to receive you as a daughter; and yet—and yet——”

Here Lady Jane stopped short, confused and nervous.

Cecil smilingly assured her that neither she nor Grace had the presumption to consider herself a fitting match for her son. That she, Lady Jane, need be under no apprehension lest Grace should accept Sir Charles's offer; that she would never so badly repay Lady Jane for all her kindness, liberality, and affection.

“But did Grace return her son's affection?” Lady Jane would know that.

“Grace fancies she does,” was Cecil's reply; “but Mr. Painter says it is merely a passing fancy for ‘a pretty face.’”

“Ah, by-the-bye, what did Mr. Painter think of it all? What did Grace mean to do about him?” Lady Jane had forgotten his existence apparently, her son's vehe-

mence had driven every one but himself out of her head. But now she remembered that Grace was engaged to Mr. Painter; how then could she care for Charley?

To explain this was Cecil's most difficult task. She performed it kindly and judiciously. She excused Grace on the score of her youth, dwelt upon Mr. Painter's extreme perseverance, and added, "I feel sure she accepted him without due consideration, for since Sir Charles's return, recollections of their old companionship, their old friendship, their old flirtation in short, have come back upon her so forcibly, so overpoweringly, that she doubts the sincerity of her feelings for her accepted lover."

Lady Jane shook her head, and observed, "Ah! Cecil, the old friendship, the old flirtations you speak of, are so many stings of conscience to me."

Cecil did all in her power to soften Lady
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Jane's self-accusation, dwelling earnestly and gratefully upon the unvarying affection and kindness which she and her sister had always received at her hands. "You must not blame yourself, dear Lady Jane, for what has occurred," she said; "this *contretemps* might have happened in spite of the strictest surveillance on your part; everything that you have done has been the result of unbounded kindness and liberality. I cannot bear to hear you reproach yourself."

Lady Jane patted her cheek, kindly. "You are a dear, good child, Cecil, and I will not argue the point, since it distresses you. I only wish my judgment had equalled my kind intentions towards you and Grace. However, I will say no more on this subject at present; the mischief is done, and now the thing is, how to put a stop to it. I have had a most stormy interview with my son this morning, which

has quite upset me. He declares that he will marry Grace in spite of me, and as he is of age, he can do so if it pleases him."

Again were Cecil's tact and eloquence called into requisition, and not unsuccessfully. She reiterated her conviction that Grace would not encourage Sir Charles's attentions, and she related her interview with Mr. Painter, dwelling upon that gentleman's sanguine expectation that Grace would one day be his wife; adding, "Mr. Painter was so self-possessed, and so determined that Grace's feelings for Sir Charles were merely girlish fancies, which would soon 'burn themselves out,' that he quite carried me along with him. I really believe he is right—at all events, let us hope so. Persuade Sir Charles to go away. It is hard to ask you to do this, dear Lady Jane, when he has but just returned to you, but I see no other way of separating them."

“If Grace should refuse him, he will probably go away of his own accord,” replied Lady Jane. “But I don’t know what good it will do; he is of age, and if he choose to——”

“Oh, he will not choose—he shall not choose!” cried Cecil. “Let him but go away; time will do the rest—I feel sure it will. Do not grieve, dearest Lady Jane; oh, do not look so sad; and above all do not blame yourself for anything you have ever done for me and Grace.”

Lady Jane kissed her hot cheek.

“How earnestly you plead my cause for me, dear child! Well, I must try and believe what you say about Grace, and what Mr. Painter says. I hope and trust that he may be right, and that Grace’s feeling towards Charley may be only of a transitory character. You have taken an insupportable weight from my heart, Cecil, by these

assurances; for my son protested that Grace returned his affection, and the thought of making her unhappy has added much to my own distress; I felt that if her affections were indeed fixed upon my son, I ought not in justice (considering the facts) to withhold my consent; and yet——”

Cecil hastened to relieve her ladyship's embarrassment, declaring that her consent was out of the question—that neither she nor Grace could expect or desire it.

Much more did she say of the like description, and if her arguments did not, strictly speaking, express Grace's sentiments, they did most certainly express her own.

She shortly after took her leave, promising to let Lady Jane know the result of Sir Charles's visit to Hollowhill if she found he had been there during her absence.

Left to her own reflections, Lady Jane pondered on all that had passed, and again a flush of shame suffused her cheek. She contrasted Cecil's conduct, Cecil's sentiments with her own. The comparison was painful. "Pride of birth, pride of position," she muttered; "it is nothing else, I know that. I cannot bear that my son should marry a woman of low birth: and yet, what right have I to forbid the marriage? None—I feel that I have none. Grace is beautiful, ladylike, and high principled; what right had I to give her the education of a lady; to bring her up as my own daughter, to allow of constant intercourse between her and my son, upon terms of perfect equality; and now to say 'she is not fit to be your wife?' It was from the first all selfishness, I see it now plainly enough. I loved those girls—their society, their companionship pleased me—and so I shut

my eyes to consequences; it was very, very cruel, very wrong. Ah, if Charley's love had been fixed on Cecil, I scarcely could have refused my consent;—but I need not have told her so! there again was an uncalled for insult. But the dear girl did not, would not take it as such. She is too noble, too really high-minded. Her sole thought is to spare me pain. She makes light of Grace's love for Charley, to soften my self-accusations. Poor Grace, poor dear child! she too is behaving very well, though of course it is under her sister's guidance. She has neither sufficient clearness of judgment nor strength of mind to act thus herself. She would have accepted Charley—oh, why not, why should she not?—and yet I cannot, cannot give my consent."

The pride of birth, the pride of position, which Lady Jane acknowledged to be the only stumbling-blocks in the way of her

doing that which in her conscience she knew to be right and just, nevertheless prevailed, as prevail they have, and will, in the past, the present, and the future.

Pride says, “The marriage of your son with the farmer’s daughter, would be a *mésalliance*, and therefore are you justified in refusing your consent.”

“But,” says *Conscience*, “if you choose to transform the farmer’s daughter into a lady, you have no right to turn the lady back into the farmer’s daughter because it may suit your present convenience to do so. If the marriage be really a *mésalliance*, so was the companionship. You and you alone are responsible for this *mésalliance*, and you, and you alone should suffer for it. Not your son, not Grace, who only conform to circumstances—circumstances which you had prepared, had

sown, watered, watched over, and cultivated with your own hand."

Conscience had the best of the argument, but Pride won the day. Conscience is very frequently placed in the humiliating and mortifying position of the vanquished, when she ought (and she knows she ought) to be proclaimed the victor. No wonder that such injustice should sour her temper and make her spiteful. In the present instance Conscience kept pricking Lady Jane the whole day, she never gave her a moment's rest, her stings were both sharp and incessant, they made her ladyship wince, and no doubt her stings would have been even still more severe (for her blood was up) had she not perceived a well of love and liberality amid the desert of pride and prejudice in which her ladyship was at the time wandering. Not one word of reproach towards Grace had passed her lips;

not one thought derogatory to Grace's openness and fair dealing had ever arisen in her heart. Never for one single instant did she imagine that Grace had designedly laid herself out to catch her son ; never did she think that the whole affair was a plot, a deep-laid plot. And yet a Baronet with fifteen thousand a year was a tempting prize to a penniless young lady ! And a great temptation too it is, to shuffle off upon the shoulders of others, the blame which, properly speaking, belongs exclusively to ourselves. We all do this more or less ; there is no use in denying it, although of course we do deny it ; for it is a mean, cowardly habit, not at all complimentary to, or indeed consistent with the high sense of honour which we entertain for ourselves. But, that there is an innate tendency to exonerate ourselves at the expense of others is, I believe, an axiom in our natural juris-

prudence universally acknowledged. Our acts of wisdom, our deeds of goodness are our own peculiar property. Our success and prosperity are also solely and entirely to be attributed to our own wisdom and prudence. Should our bosom friend venture to claim even the very slightest participation in our virtues or their rewards, he is our bosom friend no longer: he is "poor Jones," who is always giving his advice when it is not wanted. But with our faults, our follies, or our failures, we are charmingly liberal. We will share them with any or with every one. "My dear Jones, you surely remember that it was you who first advised me to put my money into that confounded business?" "My dear Jemima, you never let me rest until I bought that cow, and now you say she is good for nothing; if it had not been for you," et cetera.

If these examples are not suggestive of past experiences to you, they are to me.

Therefore, all honour to Lady Jane Dimdale. If we cannot conscientiously exonerate her inconsiderate and injudicious conduct towards her adopted daughter, let us at least award her the praise she so richly deserves in taking the whole blame upon herself for the evil consequences which her thoughtlessness had brought about.

“Dear me,” said Lady Jane, as she waited impatiently for the return of her son, “I quite forgot to ask Cecil about my unfortunate brother-in-law! this business of Charley’s has put everything else out of my head.”

It is not extraordinary, however, that Colonel Jacob Dimdale’s existence should, for the nonce, have slipped Lady Jane’s memory; but she felt much ashamed of her forgetfulness, and worried herself ex-

ceedingly thereat ; which, to say the truth, had rather a beneficial effect upon her ladyship's spirits, inasmuch as the old worry acted as a counter-irritant and alterative upon the new worry ; for it is a mistake to imagine that a plurality of misfortunes must of necessity be overwhelming. They frequently balance each other, and are more easily borne together than separately.

To the truth of this hypothesis many a meek and patient donkey would doubtless, could he speak, bear willing testimony, as he staggers beneath the weight of a one-sided burden.

As Cecil pursued her way at a rapid pace across the frozen fields and through the brown and leafless wood, she perceived a figure approaching. "I thought so," she murmured; "I am glad I *walked* home."

Hurrying towards and paying no atten-

tion to her salutation, Sir Charles Dimdale—for he it was—accosted her in a quick angry tone.

“What is the meaning of this, Cecil?” he said. “Why am I not to see Grace? why am I not to—to see her, I say?”

“It is better for both, Sir Charles, that you should not meet at present.”

“‘Sir Charles!’ ‘Sir Charles!’ ‘Sir Charles!’ I am sick of the name!” cried the young man, passionately; “you and Grace were everlastingly ‘Sir Charles-ing’ me at dinner yesterday. What do you mean by it, Cecil? You never used to call me anything but Charley.”

“I beg your pardon—you forget. I called you ‘Sir Charles’ before I left home, and gave you my reasons for doing so, which I will now repeat——”

“Oh, I remember well enough, thank you! a parcel of nonsense about our being

no longer children; and my position—and your position. But I never thought that you really meant what you said. It is too ridiculous that you and Grace, whom I have always regarded as sisters, should—should—”

He hesitated, for Cecil's eye was upon him.

“It was because I saw the possibility, I might say the probability of your not always continuing to regard us in the light of sisters *only*, that I considered it right to discontinue calling you by your Christian name. I hoped, I believed I was in time to prevent any foolish fancies arising between you and Grace, but it seems I was not.”

“No, you were not. I love Grace, and what's more, I'll marry her in spite of you all. Why you should ‘fear’ my falling in love with her I know not, except that you

never liked me yourself; but that is no reason why your sister should not like me. If she is satisfied you might be, I should think!"

Sir Charles was in a towering passion, and so of course talked nonsense. It was the first time in the life of the spoilt child that he had been thwarted in anything that he had seriously set his heart upon. His violence had always frightened his mother, but it had no effect upon Cecil, who said, quietly—

" You know very well that I *do* like you, Sir Charles; you are associated with all my childish and girlish recollections as playmate and friend; but that has nothing to do with this matter. It little signifies what *I*, individually, think of your marrying my sister, but it does signify what Lady Jane thinks; and you are bound in love, if not in law, to respect her wishes."

“ But I can’t, and I wont. I love Grace more than I love my mother, or any one else in the world, and I know she likes me, and she would never have written this (holding up a slip of paper) if you had not made her do it. There, read it,” he continued, thrusting the note into Cecil’s hand, “ though you know the contents well enough, I dare say,” he added, bitterly.

The note contained only a few lines, but certainly much to the purpose, and thus it ran:—

“ I thank you very, very much for wishing to marry me. I am grateful and proud that you should think me worthy of being your wife, but I *never, never* can be. I shall always think of you with gratitude and affection—with sisterly affection—but nothing more. Oh, Charley! go away and leave me; it will be better for us both;

for *never, never* can I or will I be your wife.—G. M.”

The tears came into Cecil’s eyes. “That poor, sad, struggling heart, how it must have ached as those few lines were penned!” she thought.

“Well,” said Sir Charles, impetuously, “are you satisfied with your work?”

“I am satisfied with what Grace has done, because I know, and you will some day know, that she has acted right. Stop; hear what I have to say before you interrupt me, Sir Charles. Although—”

“Call me ‘Charley,’ or I swear I will not listen to a syllable you have to say,” he replied, angrily.

Cecil could not forbear smiling: he seemed to attach so much importance to a mere trifle. She placed her hand kindly on his shoulder. “You are a spoilt child, Charley,” she said; “and you *will* have

your own way: you always have with every one."

"Except with you," he said; "I never had with you. Oh, Cecil! why are you so set against my marrying Grace?"

"If you will promise not to get into a passion, I will tell you."

The promise was given readily enough—nothing so easy to give, nothing so difficult to keep.

"If what I say should appear to you unkind, believe me, nothing unkind is intended," began Cecil. "I feel for your present unhappiness, indeed—indeed I do; but I must not let pity prevent my speaking plainly. You ask me why I am averse to your marrying Grace? For the same reason that Lady Jane is averse to it. Because your position in life demands that you should marry into a good family; because unequal marriages are always, sooner

or later, a source of unhappiness to both parties. These are my reasons—these are your mother's reasons; and although you may not, and probably do not appreciate or acknowledge them now (it is scarcely to be expected that you should), yet depend upon it the day will come when you will thank——”

“Never! never! Neither now nor ever shall I thank you for destroying my happiness,” cried Sir Charles, breaking forth once more; “and I don't agree to a word you say. Birth! what signifies birth?—Grace is a lady, and I am a gentleman: where is the inequality you speak of? Besides, it is too late to talk of that now; my mother should have thought of that before. It is all her own fault in throwing us together, and I say she has no right to object to our marriage; it is most unjust, most unfair, most unkind—but I don't

care, I am determined—— Where are you going, Cecil?"

"I am going home—there is no use in speaking to you in your present frame of mind; and besides, I will not stay to hear you abuse the kindest and best mother that ever man had. Do not interrupt me, if you please. Lady Jane has but one fault—a fault which you certainly do not inherit, Sir Charles—too great a consideration for the feelings of others. This tenderness of heart may occasionally warp her judgment—she cannot bear to say or do anything that may hurt the feelings of those she loves. Therefore has she spoilt you from your earliest infancy—therefore did she treat Grace and me as equals. But it ill becomes you, Sir Charles, to apply the term "unkind" and "unjust" to one who, from your birth to the present moment, has devoted herself to you with an untiring,

unselfish affection, rare even in a mother, and still less would it become me to listen to you."

She turned to leave him: her heightened colour and her trembling lip proclaiming the strength of her feelings.

Sir Charles stood regarding her in silent anger. "Was she really going?"

It seemed so indeed; for she walked steadily on, her proud head erect, and her commanding figure drawn up to its full height.

"What a rage she is in!" he muttered. Then shouting at the top of his voice, "I don't care what you say, I will marry Grace in spite of you all!" he too turned, and pursued his way homeward.





CHAPTER IV.

CATHERINE DOYLE GIVES SIR CHARLES A PIECE OF HER MIND.



HEN Cecil arrived at Hollowhill, she found her aunt anxiously awaiting her return.

“Did you meet Sir Charles?” were the dame’s first words.

Cecil replied in the affirmative, and related what had passed, both in her interview with him and with Lady Jane.

“And now, aunt, tell me about his visit here; but first, where is Grace?”

“Upstairs, crying her eyes out, of course; and the best place for her. Let her alone till she’s had it out all to herself; it’ll do her more good than anything, I know.”

“Poor darling! I must go and see her, I can’t bear her to be so unhappy,” said Cecil, looking ready to cry herself.

“But I say, you shall not go—I know what’s best for her: you two would just cry together, that’s all you’d do, and I should have two headaches to cure instead of one. You just sit down where you are, and I’ll tell you all as has happened.”

“But, Aunt Dorothy,” remonstrated Cecil, “I must go and tell Grace what Lady Jane said; she will be expecting me, and it would be unkind not to go. I will not stay with her, and I will promise not to cry.”

“Well, well! go along with you then—a wilful woman must have her way as well as a wilful man, I suppose; and for that matter I don’t know why she shouldn’t.”

Cecil kept her promise, she did not remain long with Grace; she thought her

aunt was right, and that it would be better to leave her sister to herself until she became more composed.

“Well, my dear,” said Dame Dorothy, as Cecil re-entered the little parlour, “and how did the poor child take her ladyship’s refusal? It was what she expected, of course?”

“She bore it very well—yes, she expected Lady Jane would refuse her consent—but she is very miserable, poor dear.”

“Of course she is, and so was I very miserable when my father wouldn’t let me marry Arthur Highton, the brewer’s son at Dummer; the handsomest man and the biggest scamp ever I saw. It wasn’t till long afterwards though as I knew he was a scamp, or I shouldn’t have let him be a sweetheart of mine. But, lor’ a massy! Cecil, how I took on to be sure! I was brimful of tears—must have been, for I re-

member as I wetted three pocket-handkerchieves through and through the day as Arthur Highton was dismissed by father; an' more than that, the pillow-case was that wet you might have wrung it next morning. I must have been biling over the whole night. But, bless your heart! it all came right enough in time. These fits of falling in love are to be looked for and expected in young women; just as teething, croup, and measles are with children; they never hurt a body if they are properly managed. So don't you fret about Grace: you was never in love with any one but Rupert, I believe, but you're an exception to the general rule in most things."

Cecil smiled at this equivocal compliment.
"Am I, aunt?" she said.

"Yes, that you are. Why there's not one girl in a thousand but has an attack of these mental measles as I call them; Grace

has 'em pretty strong, she seems to have taken the infection finely, that she does; but it wont kill her, nor yet spile her beauty, I'll be bound."

"I am afraid she cares more for Sir Charles than I thought she did," said Cecil.

"It's my belief—I tell *you*, Cecil, though I wouldn't hurt the child's feelings by saying so to her—but it's my belief as she has been caught by his handsome face and his title; and between you and me and the post, they are about the best things he has belonging to him; for Sir Charles ain't overburdened with sense—it don't take a magnifying glass to see that much; why, Mr. Painter has more sense in his little finger than Sir Charles has in his whole body."

"Well, if you are right, Aunt Dorothy, we may hope Grace will soon get over this

unfortunate attachment: a handsome face is a foolish thing to fall in love with, and as for the title, she has no business with that, and the sooner she gets it out of her head the better."

"A pretty face is oftener fallen in love with than anything else, for all that," said Dame Dorothy; "and I should like to see the girl of seventeen as wouldn't like to be 'my lady':—Of seventeen! ay, or of seventy, for the matter of that; I shouldn't mind being 'my lady' myself—'Lady Dorothy Danger' would sound grand, wouldn't it?"

"Better than 'Sir Richard?'" said Cecil, laughing.

"Better! I should think so; I can't abide the name of Richard—never could. I'm sure 'twas the name of 'Arthur' as caught my fancy with that Highton; I thought 'Mrs. Arthur Highton' looked beautiful when I wrote it down on a sheet

of gilt-edged paper, as I did, dozens of times."

"But how did you happen to fall in love with Uncle Danger, then, if you thought so much of a name?" asked Cecil, greatly amused at her aunt's revelations of the days of her girlhood.

"Pooh! I never fell in love with him; that is—well, I suppose I was what you may call in love with him, too, once upon a time. But he wasn't then the red-faced tub of a man he is now. Bless your heart, why I remember when first I ever saw Richard Danger he was a-horseback, and going to ride a race."

"Uncle Danger going to ride a race!" cried Cecil, incredulously.

"And why not, pray? Why, he was quite a slim young man in those days, and didn't weigh more than nine stone and a half, if he weighed as much. He was a-

going to ride for the Farmers' Cup at Dummer races, and I well remember his father saying to my father, 'I'll lay you a crown, Meadows, as Dick wins the cup, though he rides ten stone one—a pound overweight. Dear, dear—how well I can remember it all, to be sure!"

“And did he win, aunt?” asked Cecil, quite interested in the reminiscences of “auld lang syne.”

“Yes, he won; and there was nothing but Dick Danger! Dick Danger! dinged into my ears the whole afternoon, till I was purely sick of the name—for I hated Dick worse than I did Richard. But when I agreed to marry him (which was years after that), he had grown steady and respectable, and was called ‘Richard.’ It’s only your scamps and your harum-scarums as are Tom, Dick, and Bill. But I mustn’t go on wasting my time with this

nonsense, though it's fine fun for you, I daresay; you've been on the broad grin a'most ever since I began, and no wonder."

"Oh, Aunt Dorothy, I wish you would go on: you don't mind my laughing, do you?" said Cecil.

"Mind your laughing, child? of course not," patting her cheek fondly. "How like you are to your dear mother, pertickler when you smile so; but you are handsomer than she were, I really believe you are: though when I think of her at eighteen years of age, at the time she married John Meadows, I—but lor' bless me! if I get on about your mother I'll have the dinner sp'ilt, as I should have been to see after this ever so long age. When once an old woman begins to talk about the days when she was young, there's no stopping her; you might as well try to stop 'a fool from fiddling,' as they say."

Cecil reminded her aunt that, as yet, she had told her nothing of Sir Charles's visit; but the dame was firm: the spirit of industry was strong upon her, and Cecil must wait till the dinner had passed the perils of neglect: it was now in a transition state from raw to roast, and must be attended to.

In due course of time Dame Dorothy reappeared in the little parlour, looking flushed and heated. She wiped her face with the corner of her apron, and sinking into an easy-chair, with an *abandon* more suggestive of fatigue than refinement, she commenced the long-delayed account of Sir Charles's visit.

“He was,” she said, “furious at not being allowed to see Grace, and declared that he would not leave the house until he had seen her;” in short, he was (to use the dame's significant phraseology) “as

wilful and obstrepulous as a stuck pig, as never does lie still and die in a quiet, becoming manner, like other animals, but must always be kicking and squealing to the last minute."

It appeared that Dame Dorothy's resolution had been at least equal to Sir Charles's impetuosity, and he was obliged to content himself with sending a note to Grace, couched in passionate terms of love towards her, and of anger towards the rest of the world.

"And," added the dame, "when Sir Charles got Grace's answer, he was worse than ever, and begun to storm and rave so as I wouldn't bear it any longer, and so I told him. 'I would not do or say anything disrespectful to your mother's son, Sir Charles,' says I, 'but I can't and I wont have my house turned upside down by you nor nobody else; and as Lady Jane is

against your marrying Grace—as is right and natural she should be—and as Grace refuses to see you, sir, the best thing you can do, if you'll excuse my being so bold, is to go away.””

Mrs. Danger paused for breath, had recourse once more to the corner of her apron, and then burst out laughing.

“Oh, Cecil! if you had only seen the look he gave me, and the way he turned on his heel and was off before you could say ‘Jack Robinson,’ you’d ha’ laughed too. If ever a body went off with a flea in his ear, Sir Charles did this day! Well, I’m sorry to disoblige any one of the name of Dimdale, but I’m not a going to be bawled out of my house by let it be who it will: and after all’s said and done, if I offend Sir Charles I shall please Lady Jane; *she’ll* thank me for it if he don’t, and she has the best right to my services in every way. We hold Hollow-

hill under her, and not under him, I'm thankful to say."

"You don't like Sir Charles, Aunt Dorothy—you never did, I think."

"Yes, I did; but I liked him better as a boy than I do as a man."

Cecil's opinion of Sir Charles being pretty much the same as that of her aunt, there was no opening for argument, and the conversation naturally dropped.

Dame Dorothy drew her work-basket towards her, and was soon deep in the mysteries of stitching, hemming, and darning, and Cecil took the opportunity of stealing softly upstairs to Grace.

The sisters had a long and interesting conversation, in which they frequently differed in opinion. Cecil's arguments silenced but did not convince Grace.

"Why had she no right to think of a title?—why was she better without one?"

You will be kind enough to imagine one week to have passed since Sir Charles Dimdale quitted Hollowhill with, as Dame Dorothy observed, "a flea in his ear." During that period Sir Charles had successively gone through two stages of the disease with which he was afflicted—the furious and the fretful. Denunciations and threats were the characteristics of the first stage; pathetic lamentations and beseechings, of the second. Notes of every shape, size, and colour had been showered upon Grace, but without producing the result anticipated, or at all events hoped for, by the impetuous lover.

Lest, however, you should think Grace too hard-hearted for so tender a young lady, I feel bound to acknowledge that few of the aforesaid missives ever reached her hands; the first two or three which she received excited her so much that Cecil

considered it best to intercept the others, fearing they might unhinge or weaken resolutions which, she well knew, were not made of the sternest stuff, or capable of resisting successfully for a lengthened period the fierce and fiery assaults directed against them.

But Cecil—true to her character of straightforward honesty—invariably brought the notes to Grace, and with her permission, at first reluctantly given, committed them to the flames.

Five days having passed, during which time ten notes had been despatched and no answer received, the smouldering wrath of Sir Charles blazed forth. It was vented on Catherine Doyle, for, angry as he was, he dared not face Cecil. But a servant—only a servant—was of course a safe person to fall foul of. A most unworthy idea, which I feel satisfied you, dear friend, never entertained for

a moment;—and in this instance Sir Charles had better not have entertained it either, as he very soon discovered; for Catherine, being exceedingly attached to all the Hollowhill family, and being entirely untrammelled by the laws of politeness and refinement which rule the conduct of the educated classes, besides being possessed (as you have doubtless observed) of quite as high a spirit as that of Cecil, replied to Sir Charles's attack with a vigour and impetuosity which bore down everything before it, silencing his fury as the Armstrong guns silenced the gingals of the Chinese. The ravings of the irate Baronet were cut short with—

“How dare you, Sir Charles, spake in that manner of my young ladies? It isn't your title, nor your rank, nor your money itself as 'ud warrant such langidge. You needn't frown nor fume at me, sir—I don't care a *strawneen* for your anger, and more

nor that, I repane that it's you should be ashamed of yourself for spaking of anny ladies as you spoke just now—and you a gentleman! and purtendin' to be fond of Miss Grace! You're no true lover, or you'd niver lay your tongue to the words you said this day. Miss Grace niver de-saved any one—can you say as much yourself? She is no jilt, and Mrs. Vicars is no termagint. Faith, I'd like to hear you tell her to her face what you telled me this minute! She is 'insolent and over-bearing,' is she? Faith! I'd give a year's wage to hear you tell herself that same!—ha! ha! that I would. An' Misther Painter is 'a rusty ould curmudgin,' is he? an' it's great presumpshin of him to think of Miss Grace? Miss Grace is good enough for the highest in the land—I'll not deny that; but if Mr. Painter hasn't got a doll's face, nor yet ladies' hands upon him, and the outside

of his head is not so handsome as some folks', the inside is better furnished, I expect."

The flashing of Catherine's eyes as she gave Sir Charles this piece of her mind, added considerably to the young gentleman's confusion. He stammered forth a denial of any intended reflections upon either Mrs. Vicars or her sister: but it was not until he found himself pursuing the uneven tenor of his way towards the Rookery, that he again permitted the outpourings of his ire to blaze forth.

I will not record the denunciations launched against the inhabitants of Hollowhill; suffice it to say, that the timid sheep, which raised their mild and simple faces to gaze reproachfully in fear and wonder at the profane disturber of their peace, were entirely justified in huddling together in a compact phalanx, and finally in scampering away to the other end of the field.

Poor Lady Jane! She had sown the wind, and she must reap the whirlwind. A spoilt child is an amiable being in comparison with a spoilt man, inasmuch as the headstrong violence of an adult is more offensive and more dangerous than infantine peculiarities of a similar description.

In the present instance Sir Charles exhibited a quality essentially belonging to those accustomed to have their own way. The more he was thwarted the more determined he was to have his own way. But in this he merely followed the law of nature—if a person of small judgment and shallow wit is ever firm upon any subject it is sure to be when he is in the wrong.

Poor Lady Jane! She listened to reproofs which she certainly merited, but not from the lips of her son. In his blind anger he taunted her with ill-judged indulgence.

“ You refused me nothing all my life until now,” he said; “ and because I have set my heart on this one thing, upon which the happiness of my whole life depends, you deny it me; it would have been kinder had you been more strict in my boyhood; kinder to have thwarted me then in matters of comparatively small account, instead of thwarting me now in what is of more consequence than all the rest. You can’t really love me to treat me so!”

Lady Jane turned pale, and trembled visibly, but she restrained herself, and answered calmly—

“ You are right, Charles; it would have been far better had I been less indulgent to you in your childhood: I deserve your reproaches; I now see the folly and wickedness of my indulgence. But the refusal of my consent to your marriage with Grace is a far greater proof of my love for you

than was my ill-judged compliance with all your wishes of former years. I don't expect you to believe this in your present excited state, but when you are calmer, older, and wiser——”

“Nonsense!” cried Sir Charles, “that is what old people always say when a man falls in love; he is excited and foolish, and doesn't know what he is talking about: but I am not to be bullied, and browbeat, and—and——”

“Who bullies, who browbeats you, Charles?” asked his mother, sorrowfully.

“Who? why everybody; you—Cecil—Dame Dorothy; and even that violent Irish girl Catherine Doyle” (his cheek reddened). “One would suppose I was a boy, to be schooled and scolded by a parcel of women; but I don't care, I will have her yet, in spite of you all! If I could but see her, only

just to have one half-hour's talk with her, I'd defy the whole set of you."

Lady Jane rose, and moved towards the door.

"Where are you going, mother? That is just like you; you always go away now when I press you on this subject. The fact is, you know I have the best of the argument—you can't deny a word I have said; it is most unfair, unjust, and—"

"Stop a moment, Charles," said Lady Jane, turning and speaking sternly, though more in sorrow than in anger; "I am leaving you because I do not choose to listen to your unbecoming language. Arguments and reason are both thrown away upon you, for you can understand neither; your replies are only insolent accusations and undutiful reproaches, to which I will not subject myself. You know my wishes, and if you are determined to disregard

them, I cannot help it. You are of age, and may marry whom you please ; but I beg that this subject may be dropped between us for the future."

" Oh ! it's very easy to say I may marry whom I please, but you know very well——"

Lady Jane was gone.

He bit his lip ; his mother's departure was a reproof that even he could feel, although it in no wise altered his determination. He *would* see Grace—nothing—nobody should prevent that. She could not be shut up a prisoner at Hollowhill all her life, and if once she ventured out, he would be by her side, he would speak to her though she were guarded by the redoubtable Dame Dorothy herself, or even the fiery Cecil.

Now in this resolution I think Sir Charles was right. I do not say that his persevering in his love for Grace was right,

but I do say that he was right not to accept his dismissal from any lips but her own.

“Where there is a will, there is a way.” When a man’s whole energies are bent upon one point, nine times out of ten he succeeds.

In the present instance I have shown you the “will,” but I cannot point out the “way.” Pounds, shillings, and pence, possibly, had something to do with it. They are the reputed, nay, the acknowledged sinews of war. May they not have something to do with love? Not with the passion itself: that, of course, remains always pure, and undefiled by the contaminating stream of avarice. The heart of a lover knoweth not the word “money,” except as a means to an end. Bribery and corruption are not—at least were not thirty years ago—confined to “free and

independent burgesses," and their representatives—or, I should rather say, the agents of said representatives ; for it is well known that the candidates themselves are all honourable men, and would scorn to do a dirty action *in propriâ personâ*.

Now in the days of which I write "the itching palm" was rife in the land ; and doubtless many a Mercury might have been found, even amidst the primitive precincts of Hollowhill, who for a consideration would undertake to deliver a note in silence and secrecy to the forlorn Grace.

That such an occurrence did actually take place, there is no record in the archives either of the Dimdales or the Dangers ; and when we consider that the watchful and observant Cecil, the clear-headed and unscrupulous Dame Dorothy, and the quick-sighted Catherine were to be outwitted; one would say that the

thing was impossible. But subsequent events seemed to deny the impossibility; and that prison doors as well guarded as those which confined the hapless Grace have been unlocked by a silver key, is matter of history.





CHAPTER V.

SHOWING THAT "IT IS NEVER TOO LATE
TO MEND."

MR. PAINTER'S philosophy was of that stubborn sort that defies circumstances. He, and he alone, was aware of Grace's secret meetings with Sir Charles. He had seen them together in the wood holding sweet converse. He had seen their meeting, he had seen their parting embrace, and the sight had caused him to close his telescope with a bang of impatience, and to mutter words which even the dullest of the dull could not have mistaken for a benediction upon the head of Sir Charles. But faith in his own pro-

phecy never wavered for a moment. That Grace would eventually be his, he felt sure. Her passion for the boy-Baronet would pass by—he had said it, and he would abide by it.

So he turned his telescope seaward, and swept the horizon with a professional gaze, and sat down upon a rock, and tried to persuade himself that he was not jealous—which was absurd, for of course he was. No one—not even a philosopher—can see a man kiss the woman he loves (although half a mile off) without a sinking of the heart, and a rising in the throat. Philosophers have feelings and affections as well as common mortals; if they think it dignified to ignore them, let it pass—it is an innocent hallucination.

Mr. Painter was not an intentional spy. His duty led him into wild, out-of-the-way places, upon rocky heights where he could

"sweep the ocean and survey the land," and so it happened that his glass had chanced upon the lovers, concealed beneath an overhanging bank. Were they smugglers?—for one moment he thought so; the next undeceived him. Smuggled goods perchance: but not the contraband for which he was on the look-out, with which he was authorized to make or meddle.

And can you wonder at, or can you blame the feeling which prompted Mr. Painter to revisit that same spot? He determined that he would resist the temptation; he said to himself that it was mean to watch the unconscious lovers. And so, perhaps, it was: but human nature prevailed over lofty sentiment—as prevail she often will—and again and again he found himself revisiting that high and solitary spot, and again and again he witnessed

that which sent a pang to his heart, and a bang to his telescope.

He could not help watching them, but he could help betraying them. No, he would not betray them; another might, and ought perhaps, but, circumstanced as he was, it would be the height of meanness to betray them. Dame Dorothy and Cecil should keep a better look-out.

It was thus that Mr. Painter reasoned—whether badly or well, whether rightly or wrongly, I leave to those better informed than myself, to determine.

And so the lovers met and re-met, and no one was the wiser—certainly not the lovers themselves.

* * * * *

One morning Dame Dorothy informed Cecil that Colonel Dimdale desired particularly to see her. She obeyed the summons; and shocked indeed she was

at his appearance. He was thin and emaciated when he arrived at Hollowhill some six weeks previously, but now he was a living skeleton: his cheeks hollow, his eyes sunk and preternaturally large, his hands transparent; but his manner was calm and composed. All anger, all irritation, and, what was still more strange, all fear seemed to have passed away. He had a pile of papers before him, and an open Bible by his side.

As Cecil approached, a hectic flush appeared for a moment upon his withered cheek, and, vanishing as quickly as it came, left his face even more cadaverous and unearthly than before. He signed to his visitor to be seated, and spoke as follows—

“Mrs. Vicars, I have sent for you, although I well know that the sight of me must be most distasteful; but I wish to deliver into your own hands this document” (he handed her a paper). “That

paper contains a distinct and solemn declaration of your husband's entire innocence of the crime which I had managed so cruelly to fix upon him. I have acknowledged that the whole of the forgery was my work, and mine only—that your husband was as ignorant of it as the child unborn. And this declaration I have read over to Mr. and Mrs. Danger, who have witnessed my signature to the document. Rupert, therefore, need no longer conceal himself. Give him this paper; let him at once communicate with the proper authorities, and have the unjust stigma removed from his name."

Here the Colonel was interrupted by a violent fit of coughing, which seemed as if it would shake from the frail tenement the little of life that remained. He sank back utterly exhausted, the white cambric handkerchief was pressed to his lips, and

on its removal, Cecil saw that it was stained with blood.

“ You are ill, Colonel Dimdale,” she cried.
“ You ought to—you must have advice.”

The Colonel smiled faintly. “ No advice would avail me, Cecil; I am dying, I have known it long, and I thank God for it. I thank Him also for having spared me thus long, till I could do justice to your husband; till I could repair, as much as in me lies, the shameful, wicked injury I have wrought him.”

Again that hollow cough shook the wretched man, and again the white handkerchief was crimsoned with his life-blood.

Cecil thought he was dying, and moved towards the door to call for help, but the Colonel begged her to remain.

“ Let me finish what I have to say, Cecil, and then go for any one you please—a

doctor or a gaoler—it's all the same to me."

He motioned for a wine-glass which stood on a table close by. Cecil handed it to him; he drank off the contents eagerly, a slight flush returned to his white cheek, and strength to his feeble voice.

"Cecil," he said, "I have been a pitiless, merciless enemy to you and yours. I need not recapitulate the deeds I have done—I shudder when I think of them—you know them too well. Your mother, against whom I sinned more than all, for I strove to rob her of her good name—I thank God, unsuccessfully—your mother, I say, forgave me on *her* death-bed. Can you forgive me on *mine*?"

Cecil hesitated; she changed colour and breathed hard, but she remained silent.

Colonel Dimdale had raised himself to a

sitting posture ; he bent forward and fixed his eyes eagerly, imploringly upon her face, then sinking back with a deep groan, he muttered, “I do not deserve it, and yet I had hoped.”

With the exception of the varying colour upon her cheek, Cecil had shown no sign of emotion ; and yet what a tumult of conflicting feelings was struggling in her breast ! There, before her eyes, lay the man who had brought ruin and disgrace upon her parents, who had indeed, as he himself had said, been a “pitiless enemy” to her and hers ; and she was asked to forgive him. She could say the words with her lips easily enough, of course ; could she honestly and sincerely from her heart forgive him ? that was the question. Her mother’s wrongs, her father’s ruin—were they to be wiped away from the tablets of memory—to be blotted out—to be atoned

for by a soft word, a beseeching look?—even though it were upon a death-bed? And yet her mother had forgiven him; she knew that, for she had heard her breathe the forgiveness. Her eyes grew softer at the recollection; the hard expression vanished from her brow, and a kind and gentle smile was on her lips as she said, “I forgive you.”

Eagerly he seized her outstretched hand.
“Say that again! say it again, Cecil! Can it be true?—can you really, from your heart, forgive me?”

“Really and from my heart I forgive you, Colonel Dimdale, all the evil you have wrought to me and mine. And it is not this paper (although it will enable my husband to remove from his name the aspersions which you had cast upon it), it is not this paper which has influenced me in my forgiveness. In affording me this proof of

Rupert's innocence you have but performed a bare act of justice, and although I thank you for it, I can never consider it an atonement for the ill you have done us. But, Colonel Dimdale, my mother forgave you ere she died, and what are *my* wrongs compared with *hers*?"

"But a still higher principle impels me to forgive. In my pride and passion I have fought against this principle; I have hardened my heart against you, I have hated you with an unholy hatred—oh! I have had wicked thoughts about you! and yet I knew that I was wrong. 'Love your enemies,' 'Do good to those who despitefully use you and persecute you,' were words familiar to me from my childhood. I repeated them as a lesson without a meaning; I could not but see and admire the beauty of the Divine command, but I had neither strength of will nor holiness of purpose sufficient to

obey it. But the memory of my mother's patience under wrong, her forgiveness of injury, her true Christian charity, has awakened my better nature, and I have prayed for strength to overcome my vengeful thoughts; and, thank God! strength has been vouchsafed me. Colonel Dimdale, I do indeed forgive you, even as I hope myself to be forgiven."

Colonel Dimdale was much overcome. "Cecil," he said, "you have heaped coals of fire on my head; every word that you have uttered has stabbed me to the heart. A qualified forgiveness I had hoped for, but I had not ventured to hope for a pardon so kind and so complete. Little have I deserved such generosity at your hands. The evil I have done, has of late haunted me like a nightmare; it has embittered my daily life, and would have embittered my parting breath, had I not received your for-

giveness. Now I can die in peace. My sister-in-law has pardoned me—and Rupert—Rupert, would perhaps—if—”

He sank back exhausted.

“Rupert forgives you everything. I will answer for him,” said Cecil, eagerly.

A look of gratitude crossed the wan and withered face of the dying man; he could not speak, but he pressed Cecil’s hand feebly, and his lips moved in prayer. Again his eyes wandered towards the bottle of cordial. Cecil poured some into the glass and offered it to him; he drank eagerly as before, and seemed to revive, although not in so great a degree as at the first draught. He beckoned Cecil to approach nearer; she bent over him. He spoke slowly and with difficulty—

“Take that paper to Rupert; quick! quick! Bid him come—to me—his pardon—I must have—before I die.”

“Is there anything I can do for you before I go?”

He shook his head. “Your kindness is more than I deserve,” he whispered.

Cecil adjusted and smoothed his pillows, placed the bottle of cordial within his reach, and silently took her departure.

She found her aunt in the little parlour, anxiously awaiting her return. “Well, Cecil,” she said, “you’ve got the paper, I see. I wish you joy, and Rupert too; and I’m sure I wish myself joy, as well I may; knowing all about it, as I did, ever since seven o’clock last night, and not allowed to tell you or nobody a word. It’s my belief that old Colonel did it a purpose to aggravate me. There’s nothing swells a body up equal to a secret—I’m sure I thought I’d a burst with mine; I couldn’t sleep for it, I was that hot, an’ I kept fidget—fidget—fidget—and your uncle,

he slept and snored—lor a massy! how that man does snore!—and when one is restless oneself, it’s the provokingest thing to see anybody so comfortable and unconcerned—it’s more than I can bear; so I shook your uncle by his two shoulders till he woke, and says I, ‘Richard Danger, you’ll blow the roof off the house; you’re worse than that new-fangled steam-ingeine they’ve got down at Dummer.’ But all I got was a grunt, and off went Richard Danger again, worse than ever. I thought daylight never would have come—but ‘It’s a long lane as has no turning,’ they say, and it’s a long night as has no morning. But you’re wanting to be off to Rupert, as is natural you should; send Kattern to me, or Jane, for Kattern’s busy—which is more than Jane is, I guess.”

Before Cecil left Dame Dorothy, she told her how ill she had found the Colonel, and

asked if she knew what the bottle contained of which he drank so freely.

The dame indignantly replied, that she should think she *did*. "It's not likely as I'd poison a body in my own house—not even Colonel Dimdale, bad as he is. Why, Cecil, that cordial has been in our family more than a hundred years; many and many a glass of it has your poor mother had, and you'll be glad enough of it, may be, before you die. I remember, just before you was born, when the pains came bad, sister Cecil said there was nothing seemed to give her relief like that cordial; and so you'll find when—"

"Thank you," said Cecil, somewhat abruptly, smiling and blushing at the prophecies which she was anxious to cut short, especially as the laughing grey eyes of Catherine Doyle, who had just entered the room, were fixed upon her with provoking

intelligence. “Well,” she continued, “and you will go to Colonel Dimdale, aunt, at once, will you not? for I am sure he is very ill.”

Mrs. Danger did find Colonel Dimdale very ill—worse, much worse, than she had expected. So bad, indeed, that she dared no longer take the responsibility of his case upon her own hands. A doctor must be sent for, instantly. Doctor Duke, of Dummer, must be the man. True, he knew Colonel Dimdale personally, and Mr. James, the new doctor, probably did not know him; he was a young man, whom nobody knew, and very likely he was not to be trusted. He’d be sure to blurt out that he had been sent for to see a sick gentleman at Hollowhill—he’d be so proud of the job, he’d never be able to hold his tongue about it, she was certain of that; and then the Colonel would be caught

after all. Besides, she had no confidence in Mr. James's drugs, nor in his medical skill either; he'd be as likely to kill the Colonel as to cure him. She said at the time, and she said still, that Betty Slope need never have died of her last child, if Mr. James had known his business; but she never could abide a man with great staring eyes, bolting out of his head as though there was something inside they were afraid of.

Thus reasoned the dame, and the result of her reasoning was the departure of one of the stable-men upon Mr. Danger's favourite hack, in search of Dr. Duke—the cautious, prudent Dr. Duke, the physician and friend of the Dimple family. Mrs. Danger also sent to apprise Lady Jane of her brother-in-law's serious illness.

As Cecil walked rapidly along the road to Dummer, she thought over her late inter-

view with Colonel Dimdale. Was it true that she had forgiveñ him?—that she, Cecil Meadows—Cecil Vicars, had spoken words of comfort and kindness to that man—had ministered to his wants?—to his—the enemy of her race, the pitiless destroyer of her father's health, and wealth, and life? Ay, life! for had he not persecuted him even unto death? And her husband too: branded with the name of *Felon!* even now fleeing from the justice he had not provoked, pursued by the laws he had not broken, his good name tarnished—and all this misery and tribulation brought upon him by the false accusations of this very man! Yes, it was even so. This proud woman, stern of purpose and strong of will, who loved and hated with a fierce intensity unknown to weaker natures, had forgiven the wrong-doer the evil which he had brought upon all those whom she loved

best. And yet, so great is the force of habit, so long had she harboured hatred and revenge in her heart, so long had she thought with contempt and loathing of her implacable foe; the slanderer, the maligner, the destroyer of those so dear, that ever and again a feeling of doubt would arise as to the necessity of forgiveness on her part. Was that indeed the true teaching of the Gospel? “Forgive your enemies,” “Forgive them who trespass against you?” But such an enemy! such trespasses! Were they, could they be included in the Divine command?

Cecil suddenly stood still, alarmed at the direction her thoughts were taking. A host of recollections rushed upon her; recollections of His life upon earth—His life of love and mercy—of humility and forgiveness—and of the last prayer which left His lips—lips agonized by mortal pain—“Father, forgive them, for they know not

what they do." "And who, or what am I?" said Cecil, "that I should presume to car and cavil—to split straws as to how much I should bear, and how much resent! Oh, miserable, miserable pride, when shall I have the power to trample you under foot? to spurn you from me? to know you for what you are?—a mean, despicable parasite which destroys everything to which you cling. A false principle—a false friend—a base and baseless impostor. What right have you to claim authority to instruct and to direct? What has pride to do with poor, corrupt, fallen human nature? After all, of what am I proud?—of my superior wisdom, my superior excellence, my superior virtue? How do I know that I should not have done as wickedly or worse than Colonel Dimdale, under the same circumstances? If my principles are better than his, the merit belongs not to me, but

to those who, with God's blessing, instilled them into my young mind; who, both by precept and example, placed the right ever before me, and taught me to avoid the wrong. If I have sinned less heinously than Colonel Dimdale, it may be because my temptations to sin have been less. When I think of all the evil I have done, and all the good I have left undone, I feel indeed thoroughly ashamed of my hard, unforgiving temper, and my severe judgment of another's faults. What right had I to judge? How dare I say to my fellow sinner, 'you have sinned past my forgiveness?'

Cecil walked on with a lighter heart than she had felt for many a day. The prospect of Rupert's speedy restoration to his right position in the world, was in itself sufficient to bring thankfulness to her heart and brightness to her eyes. And the conscious-

ness that she had been enabled at length, after many a struggle, to fulfil her mother's wish, brought with it a peaceful, quiet joy to which she had long been a stranger. As oil upon the troubled waters, as balm upon the aching sore, was this one act of Christian charity. And this is the natural and inevitable result of that Divine teaching which all acknowledge but so few follow. The exasperation and bitterness with which we dwell upon the wrongs and injuries committed against us, do but exaggerate the evil. The more we nurse our wrath, the more violent it becomes; the more we brood over our wrongs, the more heinous they appear. Anger is the canker of the soul: it eats away and destroys all healthy aspirations, and turns all it touches to desolation and corruption.

Rupert Vicars was pacing Dirge Loafer's kitchen, like a wild beast in a cage. "He

would not stand it any longer, and if the Colonel was, as they said, too ill to move, he would go without him—he and Cecil could cross the water and be together. He would not be separated from her; the Colonel was safe where he was; and when he was able to join them, the Flukes would get him over easily enough. He would no longer be separated from Cecil—of that he was determined."

"Dirge," he said, "I have settled what to do—I have made up my mind to—"

He stopped and listened eagerly; a flush of pleasure and surprise crossed his face as a well-known footstep was heard in the passage.

He approached the door, but ere he reached it Cecil had entered, and was in his arms.

"How daring of you to come so openly, my love! But you, like me, are tired of this

hide-and-seek life. I cannot bear it any longer; let us cross the water at once, and the Colonel may follow when he is able. I do him no good by staying here; on the contrary I do him harm, for if by chance they should take *me*, they would ransack every hole and corner in the parish, until they find him.”

“ Why do you laugh, Cecil? you—you—you—”

“ Be quiet, Rupert, and that man by,” whispered Cecil, blushing most bewitchingly.

“ I beg your pardon, my darling, but I haven’t kissed you for a week, and you look so lovely! But you have some good news, I am sure—what is it? Dirge, just keep a look-out, and warn off intruders whilst Mrs. Vicars stays—will you?”

“ Ay, ay, sir, I’ll take care as nobody doesn’t interrupt you, don’t you be afeared. As if I don’t know what he wants me

to goo for," he muttered, as he left the room.

Rupert was, of course, delighted with the contents of the paper which Cecil gave him; but, to her dismay, he raised an objection to taking advantage of it which had not occurred to her.

"By showing this paper to the authorities, Cecil, I shall clear myself, it is true; but I shall betray the Colonel; and I should not like to do that after having screened him so long. Besides, it would be a bad return for this generous act of his. He must be changed, as you say, to have done so self-sacrificing a deed as this; it redeems much of the past, in my opinion."

"But, Rupert," urged Cecil, "why should it be known where he is? Surely you would not be forced to tell?"

Rupert pointed to the signatures of Mr.

and Mrs. Danger, as witnesses to the Colonel's confession.

"There would be no need for me to tell," he said; "besides, the paper is dated 'Hollowhill.' Your uncle and aunt would get into trouble for having harboured him."

Cecil was much disappointed; she had expected that Rupert would accompany her back to Hollowhill, openly and fearlessly. But this, he explained to her, was out of the question; as, independently of the risk to Colonel Dimdale, he himself might be taken by any one who chose to arrest him, as the warrants were still out.

"No, no, Cecil," he said; "I won't have Bob Cuff's hand upon my shoulder, if I can help it. But I will come up to Hollowhill after dark this evening—I think I may venture to do that, now that the heat after me has cooled down a little—and then we

will talk over matters and see what can be done."

Cecil reluctantly acquiesced in this arrangement, and returned alone to Hollow-hill.





CHAPTER VI.

HOW CECIL SAW A VISION.

 S Cecil approached the little garden-gate at Hollowhill, the door of the house opened, and Doctor Duke issued forth upon the gravel-walk.

“How is he, Doctor?” asked Cecil, quickly; she could not tell why, but her heart misgave her.

“The Colonel will give neither you nor others any more trouble, Mrs. Vicars,” was the calm reply.

“Oh, Doctor Duke! surely he is not dead!”

“He is, indeed; he was dead before I reached the house. And, considering all the

circumstances of the case, it's the best thing that could have happened, both for his own sake and for the sake of every one belonging to him; he has been nothing but a disgrace to his family these twenty years. I am sure his conduct has almost been the death of poor Lady Jane, and as for you and your family, Mrs. Vicars, he——”

“We will not talk of that at present,” interrupted Cecil, disgusted with the Doctor’s professional hard - heartedness. “Colonel Dimdale has gone to his last account, and it is not for us to judge, or to condemn him. Poor man! I little thought when I left him three hours ago, that I should never see him alive again.”

“ You can scarcely regret him, I should think,” said the Doctor.

“ I do not pretend to regret him individually, but I am shocked at the sudden death of a fellow-creature.”

Cecil passed into the house, and the Doctor proceeded on his way, mumbling indistinct sentences within his worsted comforter, amidst which, "Proud woman—man no better for being dead—all stuff and nonsense," might by an attentive ear have been distinguished.

I trust that you agree with Cecil and not with Doctor Duke: A man may be no better because he is dead, but there is a smack of harshness in speaking disagreeable truths of one but just departed; we all cling in our own hearts to the *De mortuis nil nisi bonum* precept. Even if it be not borne out by the life of the departed, it is more in accordance with the charity that "hopeth all things" and "believeth all things."

Yes, Colonel Jacob Dimdale was dead. He had lived to complete one act of justice, and to repent of fifty acts of injustice. It

was a merciful end for one who had sinned so deeply. He had died in his bed—he had died *without* the clutches of the law: the name of *Felon* had hovered over his head, but had not lighted upon it. Bad man though he was, we will still say, *Requiescat in pace*, we will not pursue beyond the grave, the deeds done in the flesh. Jacob Dimdale died with a calm, peaceful smile upon his lips, and his hand upon an open Bible. How dare we affirm that the smile was not a smile of trust and faith—that he had not taken that Bible to his heart, even at the eleventh hour?

The law does not willingly relinquish a victim; but it had to relinquish two in the present instance. It had to acknowledge that Colonel Dimdale was dead, and that Rupert Vicars was innocent.

This it eventually did acknowledge, after minutely inspecting the body of the de-

funct, and diligently torturing, by every species of delay, the mind of the living.

The deeds, mortgages, and other valuable documents which had been carried off by Colonel Dimdale, were restored by Rupert; and thus the exasperation which had burned so fiercely in the breasts of the despoiled, was partially softened. But the vengeance, or I should say the justice, of the law, was not altogether balked. Colonel Dimdale left a paper behind him in which he accused the attorney, Stephen Bleer, of divers mal-practices, conspicuous amongst which, were embezzlement and forgery. Stephen Bleer was indicted, tried, condemned and transported; greatly to the satisfaction of his friends and acquaintances, whom he had more or less cheated and defrauded of their worldly possessions. We have had little to do with Mr. Stephen Bleer, and his fate would be unworthy of notice were it not that it

is satisfactory to know that a great rogue received his due.

* * * * *

The bells rang merrily as Rupert Vicars walked out of church, with his bride upon his arm, the Sunday after his return to Hollowhill. Rupert was a general favourite, and all rejoiced at his reappearance amongst them, with an untarnished name and a clear conscience. All except Bob and Tom Cuff, who, true to their nature and vocation, got drunk, quarrelled and fought, because they had not secured the reward which was once almost within their grasp, and only eluded it, Tom said, through Bob's "pig-eadedness," Bob affirmed by Tom's "hoverbearin' conduc."

And there was yet another who did not rejoice at Rupert's return. The Rev. Amos Acre would willingly that Rupert had accompanied Mr. Stephen Bleer across the Bay of Biscay to another and a far-off

Bay, which in those days was set apart as a colonial reformatory for rogues. And so well has the system answered—that is, so rapidly have rogues increased, owing to the fostering care bestowed upon them, that now we have reformatories in this the mother-country. And you, as a philanthropist; and you, as a politician; and you, as a man of sense and science, combining both philanthropist and politician, must be delighted to hear that the sites of our domestic reformatories are both salubrious and picturesque; that the juvenile offenders are well-clothed; have plenty to eat and drink, and comfortable rooms to sleep in; that they are not kept too hard at work, but have time for recreation; that they are adepts at fives, cricket, and quoits; and look forward to the time when “croquet,” “lawn-billiards,” and “Aunt Sally,” shall be introduced to their playgrounds.

Yes, ye men of sense and science—ye philanthropists and legislators, you must indeed be well satisfied with the signal success of your legislation. The race of rogues does not differ in its vitality and organization from any other race: say, the race of rabbits. Attend to their comfort and safety, feed them, preserve them, and they will increase and multiply; in so doing they but obey the eternal law of nature. Model prisons, reformatories, and tickets-of-leave have filled our towns and villages, our streets and houses, with rogues. There is no gainsaying the fact. Instead of being confined in places erected for their especial convenience, they are scattered over the country.

Who upholds the ticket-of-leave system? who upholds the studied comforts and pleasures of rogue-life? Why should Dick Smith, who picked a pocket, be better cared

for, better fed, and better lodged, than his brother Thomas, who never took his neighbour's goods?

But to return to Amos Acre; he, as I have said, was not pleased at the reappearance of Rupert Vicars. His ears tingled and his back ached, whenever he thought of Blenheim Park palings, a tearful maiden, a wrathful face, and an uplifted arm. And it so chanced, that he was ruminating upon the above curious combination one day in his study, when a well-known footstep was heard coming along the passage.

There was no mistaking the firm, quick, manly tread, or the rapid knock at the door. Mr. Acre was so taken by surprise, and, truth to say, so terrified, that he could with difficulty falter forth the words "come in." He did, however, muster up sufficient voice for the occasion, and Rupert Vicars,

the “rawhead and bloody bones” of his college life, stood before him.

There was no wrath on his countenance; but, on the contrary, a good-humoured smile, slightly contemptuous perhaps, but what of that?—anything better than anger upon the face of a strong man; so at least thought Amos Acre. Rupert Vicars even offered his hand to Mr. Acre (there was no stick in it this time), not cordially certainly, but civilly.

Mr. Acre’s face, which had assumed a death-like hue, showed renewed signs of vitality; and his heart, which had sunk down into the neighbourhood of his shoes, once more beat in its accustomed place; his voice too, divested of its sickly quaver, had quite a “cock-a-doodle-doo” tone in it, as he chirped out, “How are you, Vicars? I’m very glad to see you.”

It is true that the clarion cry was some-

what modified, and the perky appearance of the gentleman somewhat subdued again, when Rupert said—

“That was a shabby trick of yours, Acre, sending Twiggem and his men after me to Dirge Loafer’s; what made you do that, man?”

“I—I—I— Really, it was quite accidental—unintentional—that is—”

“Ah, well, we’ll say no more about it,” interrupted Rupert, with indignant contempt. “The fact is,” he continued, “I have not come here to find fault with, but to apologize to you.” Amos Acre could scarcely believe his ears. “I sent you a most unjustifiable message, which I am afraid was rudely delivered. My position at the time must be my excuse, for had I been taken, Colonel Dimdale’s capture must soon have followed, and then would have followed also, the indelible disgrace of the Dimdale

family. This I was determined to prevent at all hazards. My only object was to throw an obstacle in the way of your betraying me; I never really intended to act up to my threat, it would be most un-handsome conduct, on my part, to rake up old feuds. The follies and indiscretions of the undergraduate, have doubtless been long ago repented of; let bygones be by-gones. We are not likely to cross each other's path in life, as my duties lie chiefly in Ireland, where I go shortly; but I could not leave the country, without expressing my regret for the message which I sent you, and explaining the circumstances in which I was then situated."

Had a lion suddenly sprung through the window, and, instead of devouring Mr. Acre, offered him a piece of cake or a glass of champagne, he could not have been more astounded than he was at Rupert's

behaviour; in place of beating him, he had begged his pardon!

Little hearts are soon down and soon up again; shivering one minute, swelling the next; Mr. Acre stood on tip-toe—ran his fingers through his hair, and crowed his dunghill crow with all his might.

“ My dear fellow, don’t say another word; a man can’t do more than apologize, you know. Come, Vicars, take a glass of wine.”

Rupert declined the proffered hospitality, and so they parted. As he walked musingly through the wood, on his way back to Hollowhill, he fancied he heard voices not far off; he stopped and listened:—“ Surely that was the voice of Grace! Perhaps Cecil was with her and they were coming to meet him:”—He was on the point of calling out to let them know his whereabouts, when another

voice, which he also recognised, met his ear.

Advancing quickly and silently towards the spot whence the sounds proceeded, he came upon Sir Charles Dimdale and Grace, who were too much engrossed in conversation to perceive his approach, until he was close upon them.

They regarded each other for a few moments in silence. Grace's cheek burned, and her heart beat quick. Sir Charles was scarcely less discomposed. Rupert was the first to speak.

"I am sorry to see this," he said, "sorry and disappointed. Come, Grace," he offered his arm to her.

Sir Charles detained her. "What do you mean? what right have you to exercise authority over Grace, I should be glad to know?" he exclaimed, angry at being discovered.

“I have more right to exercise authority over her than you can have, Sir Charles; and, certainly it will be more becoming in her to go home with me, than to remain here with you; which seems to be the alternative.

“Oh, yes—yes—indeed I must go!” said Grace, struggling to disengage her hand from Sir Charles.

“Grace!” he exclaimed, passionately, “remember your promises—your vows. Oh, Grace! will you be false to me after all?” then turning to Rupert, “What right have you, what right has any one to separate us? There is no use in further disguise, Grace has promised to be my wife, and——”

“Only with Lady Jane’s consent,” said Grace, hastily.

“I shall get my mother’s consent; no fear of that.”

“Sir Charles,” said Rupert, severely, “I have nothing to do with your engagement to Grace; but Mr. and Mrs. Danger are her guardians, and *their* consent is necessary, as well as Lady Jane’s, to your marriage with their niece; but I *have* to do with my sister-in-law’s conduct when she transgresses the bounds of prudence, and, I am sorry to say it, of propriety; I must therefore request her to go with me at once.”

Sir Charles began, as usual when contradicted, to bluster and to talk nonsense.

“Where was the impropriety of their walking together?—they were not strangers—or children—they knew their own minds, and meant to marry in spite of every one. He told Cecil so a month ago, and his mother too, and now he told Rupert the same.”

“Sir Charles Dimdale,” said Rupert, his

patience becoming exhausted, "I have already told you that I have nothing to say, either for or against your marriage with Grace, it is no business of mine; but I have a good deal to say against clandestine meetings and secret engagements. You have used your influence with Grace to persuade her to do that which is wrong, what you both know to be wrong; you have induced her to deceive those whom she was bound, both by duty and affection, to obey. I am sorry you have done this, Sir Charles, and upon calm reflection you will be sorry too, I am sure."

"No, I shall not," replied the impetuous young man. "I came forward openly and demanded Grace's hand from Mrs. Danger, and she would not even let me see her. It was Cecil's fault, I know; and so I have been driven to underhand ways and means. You have driven me to act as I have done, all

of you; but no matter. You have promised to be my wife, Grace, you know you have; don't let Cecil and the rest of them, persuade you to give me up, as they did once before; that is what I am afraid of."

He still held her hand, and he looked earnestly into her eyes, as he spoke.

Grace blushed deeply. "I will keep my promise, Charley," she said, in a low but firm tone. "You need not fear me; and you will keep yours?"

"Oh, never fear! I'll get my mother's consent, I am sure of it. *Remember!*" He uttered the last word with great emphasis, and the blush on Grace's cheek deepened considerably; but she made no reply; and Sir Charles having released her hand, she returned with Rupert to Hollow-hill.

Grace was not very communicative to

her companion as they walked towards home. She would neither explain the emphatic "*remember*" of Sir Charles, nor her own deep blushes; and she listened to Rupert's lecture, on the imprudence and deceitfulness of her conduct, with an apathetic indifference, only to be accounted for, in one so sensitive, by the fact that she had not heard one word in ten of all that he had uttered.

No one likes to waste his eloquence—to hold forth to empty benches; it is a position the reverse of complimentary. I always think with pity and compassion upon the distressed feelings of "the Honourable Member" for Blank, who was proceeding to explain his views upon the proposed Educational Grant, when it was discovered that there were only twenty-six Members present, and the House accordingly was "counted out." "The Honourable Member"

must have looked very like the place he represented, poor man!

“ You are not attending to me, Grace,” said Rupert, suddenly and sharply. “ What is the matter with you—what are you blushing about?”

Grace started slightly at the accusation, but made no reply; and Rupert, finding he could get nothing out of her, gave up the attempt, and relapsed into silence. But soon he added, that he should consider it his duty to tell her aunt and Cecil of the painful discovery he had made.

Then Grace spoke. “ I shall tell them myself, Rupert, but not to-night, and you will do me a great favour if you will not mention it to-night either.”

“ But,” persisted Rupert, rather rejoiced, it must be owned, at this opportunity of paying her off for her inattention, “ why not to-night, what is the object of delay,

Grace? It is quite natural that you should wish to tell the tale yourself, in preference to having another tell it; but I cannot reconcile it to my conscience to keep these clandestine meetings of yours secret, even for one night. Your aunt ought to be informed of them at once."

Grace had a most winning manner, a sort of clinging, beseeching species of fascination about her, that few could resist; and when she placed her hand in Rupert's, and smiled into his face, she looked so like Cecil that he could not refuse her entreaties.

"I will tell them everything to-morrow, I will promise you that, Rupert," she said.

And so he consented to be silent; yet although he kept saying to himself that it could not signify whether they knew of Grace's peccadilloes that night or the next morning, he had an internal conviction

that in yielding to her request, he was acting unwisely, and that evil would come of it. But the request was in itself so moderate, nay, so natural, it seemed unkind not to let her tell her own tale; so he stifled the still small voice of conscience, and preferred to abide by what he was pleased to call the common sense view of the case. Even when he went to bed, and Cecil commented upon Grace's abstraction during the evening, he kept her secret; a fact worthy to be recorded, for he who can keep a secret from his wife, must indeed be possessed of high moral courage.

True, in this instance, the wife knew not of the forbidden fruit, so near her too, or she would have plucked it from her husband's breast, to a dead certainty. No courage, whether moral or physical, could have preserved the secret inviolate, had its existence been even suspected.

Ah! you bachelors, you may be sceptical as to this power of extraction; believe me, it is a wifely quality, well known and acknowledged by us Benedictines. *You* may bluster and talk of your "honour" and your "promise." *We* simply blurt out the truth at our wives' bidding.

Cecil was lying in that half asleep, half awake state of dreamy unconsciousness, when the door of the room opened, and Grace entered. Her large eyes were filled with tears and her face was white as marble. She came up to the bedside, bent over Cecil, and kissed her forehead.

Noiselessly she entered, noiselessly she departed. Cecil rubbed her eyes, and looked around. Rupert was sleeping quietly by her side, no one else was in the room, and the door was closed.

"It must have been a dream," she said, as she composed herself to sleep again.

And yet she had felt the pressure of her sister's lips, had seen her sad, pale face, and the big tears, and the earnest, tender gaze which she had fastened upon her.

Ah, dreams are realities whilst they last ; all have felt the pain and the pleasure of dream-life. What horror, what mortal dread in our waking existence, can exceed the agony of terror with which we strive and struggle to escape from the furious beast which is pursuing us through dreamland ? How silently and swiftly he approaches—nearer and nearer—nearer and nearer—not a sound is heard—the awful stillness of the scene is the most horrible part of it. You know that *something* is close to you, is touching you, is leaning over your shoulder, breathing on your cheek ; but you can hear nothing, can see nothing—horrible—most horrible ! If you could only move, could only scream ! But no, your legs are tied to-

gether, your tongue cleaves to the roof of your mouth.

Would you be more terrified, do you think, were you scampering through yon meadow with a mad bull at your heels? I do not believe you would; but as a set-off against the superior horrors of the nightmare, you may remember that the mad bull can toss you.





CHAPTER VII.

CATHERINE DOYLE LOSES HER TEMPER, AND
MRS. BOUNCE HER DIGNITY.

MRS. BLISS had poured out the tea, and was wondering why Mr. Doyle did not come to breakfast,—though she expressed no wonder on the subject to Mrs. Bounce,—when suddenly Larry Doyle himself burst into the room, and electrified the two ladies by exclaiming—

“I towld ye so. I knowed it—I knowed how ’twould be. They’re off! Clane gone. Half way to Gretny Green by this, as in coorse is nat’ral they should be.”

“Dear me, Mr. Doyle, how you flurry

one! Whoever are you talking of, and whatever makes you look so wild?" exclaimed Mrs. Bliss, roused from her normal state of mental apathy.

Mrs. Bounce screwed up her lips and said nothing; with the true instinct of a venomous woman, she guessed what had happened.

"Who am I talking of? Why, of the young masther and of Miss Grace, to be shure, who else? Shure, I said, times and times, that they'd run away with each other if they wasn't let marry."

Mrs. Bliss was fairly roused now.

"Goodness gracious me! who'd have thought it!" she exclaimed, setting down her cup of tea in order that she might lift up both hands in condemnation of so flagrant an act on the part of Miss Grace. "Goodness gracious! who'd have thought it?"

“Who’d have thought it?” snapped Mrs. Bounce. “Who’d have thought anything helse? I don’t pertend to be wiser than others, but I ’ope I ain’t blind, and I ’ope I ain’t quite a fool yet.”

Mrs. Bounce’s thin lips disappeared by compression, and her little eyes twinkled with venom.

Mrs. Bliss looked with calm and stolid indifference upon the excited countenance of the lady’s-maid. She was not gifted in the art of deciphering the lineaments of the human face, consequently angry looks were entirely wasted upon her; she never knew by appearances whether Mrs. Bounce was in a good or a bad humour. This blindness aggravated that lady exceedingly; who in her turn believed that it was simulated on purpose to annoy her; and that Mrs. Bliss could in reality read the rising wrath of her injured feelings quite well.

“Who brought the news?” asked Mrs. Bliss.

“Why, Kate, to be shure, and she says that Dame Dorothy is amost beside herself, and Mrs. Vicars has come over, an’ she’s with my lady this minute.”

“Dear, dear! whoever would have thought it?” repeated the housekeeper, in a placid tone. “And where is Kattern then? Why don’t she come in and have a cup of tea?”

“Shure it’s in the kitchen she is, she wouldn’t even herself with ‘the room;’ she knows her place, an’ is a good girl, though I say it, as shouldn’t say it.”

“Well then, Mr. Doyle, fetch her in, if you please,” said good-natured Mrs. Bliss; “if her father is good enough for ‘the room,’ his daughter need not sit in the kitchen.”

Larry Doyle gladly availed himself of the permission.

“Kattern Doyle is only a farmer’s

servant to be sure, but she is a visitor here, you see, and she's a well-mannered girl, and Larry's daughter and all; and I'd like to hear the ins and outs of this coorous business, though it's little she knows likely."

This Mrs. Bliss said partly to herself, partly to Mrs. Bounce, as a sort of apology for admitting Catherine within the sacred precincts of "the room." Mrs. Bounce did not like Catherine Doyle. She was too outspoken and fearless; she did not pay sufficient respect to her (Mrs. Bounce's) social position; moreover she was a firm partisan of the Meadows, whom Mrs. Bounce detested heartily. But she offered no objection to the girl's admittance to "the room," first because she, too, was anxious to know more about this "coorous business," and also because she anticipated great pleasure in abusing the Meadows before

Catherine, who would of course be utterly confounded and abashed by the disgraceful conduct of "that Grace," and would be unable to say a word in her defence. And so Mrs. Bounce's feelings being soothed by the pleasing expectations aforesaid, she observed graciously, "That she was sure she had no objections to Catherine Doyle's coming into 'the room,' though the kitchen was her proper place—but she (Mrs. Bounce) was not proud, her worst enemy could not say as she were."

Good-natured Mrs. Bliss smiled a fat, unmeaning smile, which seemed to have the same effect upon Mrs. Bounce as thunder upon cream; judging by the rapid souring of her expressive countenance.

Catherine Doyle followed her father into the room, her handsome eyes flashing, and her cheeks flushed with excitement.

"Take a chair and a cup of tea, Kattern,"

said Mrs. Bliss, "and then tell us all you know about this extro'rary business, but take a bit of something to eat first."

"It's little I know, ma'am," said Catherine, "only that Miss Grace is gone; an' she left a letter for Mrs. Vicars, sayin' as she had gone along with Sir Charles, and beggin' of Mrs. Vicars and her aunt to forgive her; I didn't see the letter, but I heard that much of it."

"Well, well, it's no use 'crying after spilt milk,' but I'm afraid my lady will take on sadly about this; she were so proud of her son. Miss Grace Meadows is a nice young lady, there's no denying that, but she ain't a match for a Baronet as might have married the finest lady in the land," sighed Mrs. Bliss.

"For my part, I pity Mrs. Vicars much more than I do my lady; young men get over such doings, but young women is dis-

graced for life, as is right they should be. I never have no opinion of set-up folks, as think themselves better than other folks; they never come to no good, never," said Mrs. Bounce, in her severest tone.

Catherine Doyle's eyes contracted and dilated much after the fashion of a Bengal tiger about to spring; but she said nothing, for she was not, as yet, quite certain as to the meaning of Mrs. Bounce's inuendoes.

" Well, to be shure it wasn't right of Miss Grace to 'lope with Sir Charles, but manny a lady, better born than her, has done the like before now; an' after all 'disgrace' is a strong word, an' one that don't belong to Miss Grace, anny way," said Larry Doyle, indignantly.

" You gentlemen hasn't the same delicate feelings as we females has," minced Mrs. Bounce, looking down with becoming bashfulness. " Any conduct in a female as

mitigates against the inherent delicacy of the sex, must always shock a right-minded woman; I'm sure I could no more helope with a young man, whether Baronet or no Baronet, than I could cut my 'ead off—shocking!"

The raised eyes and hands of the indignant Bounce, bore witness to the strength and purity of her outraged feelings.

It was not in Larry Doyle to let so good an opening for "a hit" pass by. "I'm thinkin'," he said, "that it isn't likely as your delicate feelins ull be outraged that away, ma'am: if you niver run away till a Baronet asks you to run, my word for it, you may stand at 'ase for your nat'r'l life."

"You may think what you please an' say what you please, Mr. Doyle, but I'd sooner be a poor man's wife, than a rich man's *lady*, an' so would any woman as 'ad the feelins of a woman."

Mrs. Bounce looked defiantly at Catherine Doyle, who was glaring at her more and more tiger-like every moment.

"If you plaze, ma'am," said Catherine, "I don't justly understand what you mane; why wouldn't you be a rich man's lady, if I may make so bould as to ask? Shure I know it's not right for a girl to lave her frens and run away with anny one, but I niver heard as it was more disgraceful to run off with a rich man than a poor one; an' as for Miss Grace, she's good enough an' she's handsome enough, to be a lord's wife, let alone a Baronet's."

Mrs. Bounce's countenance assumed so vivid an expression of contempt and pity, that Catherine Doyle ought to have crept under the table, or slunk out of the room, and had she been duly conscious of her own ignorance and of Mrs. Bounce's wisdom, she would, no doubt, have done either

the one or the other; instead of which she remained where she was, and even had the audacity to repeat her question touching the rich man, and that, in a tone of voice not to be said nay to.

“It’s not a subject as young girls like you should ask questions about; the less you know of such things the better. I said I wouldn’t be a rich man’s *lady*, I didn’t say I wouldn’t be his *wife*; but we’ll drop the subject if you please. I don’t know what others may think, but *I* am not used to talk of such matters, and a gentleman in the room.”

Hapless Bounce! how little did you surmise upon what a volcano you were treading; how little did you know the fierce spirit you were daring to the encounter.

“But I’ll not drhop the subject,” exclaimed Catherine, fiercely, striving hard to keep down her rising wrath. “It’s you

yourself has raised it; if it's indilicate to talk of, what made you mintion it? What has the likes of that to do with Miss Grace an' Sir Charles? Answer me that, I say!"

"Hoity-toity! you forget who you are speaking to, young woman. Answer me this and answer me that, indeed!"

But in spite of her bold words Mrs. Bounce's heart began to sink; there was a gleam in Catherine's eyes which cowed her.

"Gently, Kattern, gently. Sit down, there's a good girl. You shouldn't be so hasty," said Mrs. Bliss, not understanding the cause of the quarrel, but being, as usual, anxious to keep the peace.

But Catherine's Irish blood was up. "She would make that woman either retract her base insinuations or speak them plainly." Accordingly, paying no heed to the pacific

remonstrances of the housekeeper, she resolutely faced Mrs. Bounce and insisted upon an answer to her last question.

“ Why, you’re not so silly as to think that Sir Charles will marry Grace Meadows, are you? or that she expects him to marry her either? You’re not so very simple as that, *I* know. She might ‘ave married Mr. Painter, but she preferred being a rich man’s mistress to a poor man’s wife, that was what I meant. I speak plain enough now, I ‘ope.”

Mrs. Bliss and Larry Doyle both cried “ shame! ” upon so unjust, so infamous an accusation. Catherine advanced with white lips and flashing eyes to within a foot of Mrs. Bounce’s chair, exclaiming—

“ You infamous slanderer! if you don’t unsay them words, I’ll desthroy you! I’ll tear the life out of you! ”

Poor Mrs. Bounce sat aghast with fright,
quite spell-bound.

“Do you hear me?” shouted Catherine, shaking her rudely by the arm. “Unsay them falsehoods. Would you die with a lie in your mouth, you shameful woman?”

“Oh! take her from me! she’ll murder me—oh dear! Oh, I’ll say anything; I didn’t mean it, I didn’t indeed. Oh! save me from her! I unsay all I said; I do, I do indeed!”

But the outpourings of Catherine’s wrath were not easily stayed. Her resolute will had resisted the pressure till resistance became impossible, and at length the barrier of self-restraint was swept away by the raging torrent of anger.

“An’ how dar’ you,” she cried, “how dar’ you spake of Miss Grace the way you did, you sland’rous craythur you! an’ she as niver had a wicked thought in her head, an’ is as modest an’ as pure as she is beau-

tiful and kind; how dar' you, I say! But I bid you beware! if iver you say sich a word as you said the now of Miss Grace, the darlin'! I'll tear your false tongue out! Father, let me be."

Larry was endeavouring to calm her with "Whist now! Asy, acushla; shure she's retrackit all she said."

"I'll not harm her," continued Catherine, "but to sit silent whilst that wicked craythur was trying to blacken Miss Grace's charackter was just impossible. Faith, I'd a burst if I hadn't a spoke."

"Well, well, asy now, she'll not do it agen, my word for it," said Larry, making Catherine sit down, much to the relief of Mrs. Bounce, who drew a long breath indicative of deliverance from danger.

"Take a cup of tea and a slice of this nice cold beef, Mrs. Bounce," said Mrs. Bliss who imagined that eating and drink-

ing was a panacea for all ills, whether mental or physical.

Whilst this scene was being enacted in the housekeeper's room, a less boisterous but more painful one was taking place in Lady Jane's boudoir.

Cecil blamed herself severely for her lack of vigilance towards Grace. "Would Lady Jane suppose that she, or any of her family, had connived at the elopement? True, Grace's letter exonerated them, but that it would do, as a matter of course. Surely Lady Jane was too generous, too right-minded herself, to entertain such base suspicions towards others. And yet her only son, wealthy and titled! it was a great temptation. The world would doubtless give them credit for connivance, and that was bad enough." It galled Cecil's proud and independent spirit, it wounded her self-respect, to think of all that would be

said of the elopement; and self-respect was a salient point in Cecil's character. The idea that she might be suspected of having plotted to catch Sir Charles Dymdale for her sister—of having lulled Lady Jane into a state of false security by her representations and assurances, in order that she might the more easily concoct a plan to entrap him—brought a burning blush to her cheek.

“But no, no! Lady Jane could not so misunderstand her character—she must know her better than that.”

Thus she tormented herself with ever-returning doubts and misgivings the whole way from Hollowhill, and by the time she reached the Rookery she had worked herself into a perfect frenzy, and was as unlike the calm, self-possessed Cecil as it was possible to be; so unlike indeed, that she very soon betrayed the cause of her distress to the loving eyes of her kind benefactress,

who, in the midst of her own sorrow, could still feel for the sorrow of others. Indeed Lady Jane's grief was far less vehement than Cecil had expected. She seemed to have adopted Mrs. Bliss's proverbial philosophy—the milk was spilt, and crying would not unspill it.

“ You must not blame yourself, Cecil,” said Lady Jane; “ you have done all that it was possible for you to do, and not a shadow of blame attaches to you, and never can; your sister is no longer a child, you could not prevent her going out of the house, neither could you always be with her. I shall ever feel most grateful for the unselfish and energetic manner in which you seconded my wishes, and endeavoured to persuade Grace to give up my son.”

Thus did Lady Jane, with equal kindness and tact, reconcile Cecil to herself, by showing her that her conduct and her motives were justly appreciated. And Cecil blamed

herself for having for one moment, thought it possible that Lady Jane could harbour an unworthy suspicion in her confiding, generous heart.

“But did you not say there was a letter from Grace?” asked Lady Jane.

Cecil replied in the affirmative, and taking the letter from her pocket, read as follows:—

“Oh! Cecil, Cecil, do not—do not hate me; I cannot help it—indeed, indeed I cannot. I know how badly I am behaving to you all, and to Lady Jane too, after all her kindness and affection, but I cannot help it, Cecil. I love Charley so dearly, I must go with him; he says he cannot live without me, and I have promised, solemnly promised, to be his wife. He says, now that Rupert has discovered our meetings, we shall be separated, parted for ever; that we shall

never, never see each other again; that you will force me to marry Mr. Painter. And he made me so miserable, that at last I promised to run away with him to-night. He said all this in the evening, after Rupert had seen us together. Do you remember the cry of the curlew about six o'clock, and you said how late it cried? that was Charley, and I went to him behind the stables, and everything was settled; but I would not consent for a long, long time. I could not bear to do such a thing after all you had said to me, but Charley was like a madman when I refused to go with him. He swore he would carry me away then and there, and he would not let me return to the house till I had taken a solemn oath that I would go away with him this very night. Oh, Cecil! he was so violent, he quite terrified me; I never saw him in such a state, and yet he was so kind and so loving, and so

miserable when I would not consent. I could not—could not refuse him! But we will be back soon, and then you must all forgive us, or I shall break my heart. I dare not tell you where we are going, I have promised faithfully not to breathe a syllable about it. And now I *must* look at you once more, I cannot help it, I know it is very foolish, for you may be awake, or I may awaken you, and all may be discovered—but I cannot go without one more look, one last farewell look at you, my own darling sister. Why do I say ‘last farewell?’ I hate the words—and we shall soon meet again, and you will forgive me and love me as tenderly as ever, will you not? God bless you! Good-bye.

“Your ever-loving

“GRACE.

“P.S.—How fearfully it blows! I am so frightened.”

Lady Jane's ever-ready sympathy was at once excited by Grace's distress.

"Poor child, poor child!" she said, "we must be kind to her, Cecil, when she comes back; she is too tender a plant to live in a cold atmosphere, it would kill her; and besides, I see plainly it is all Charley's doing, he has frightened her into running away with him."

Cecil looked at Lady Jane, surprised at her words.

"Why do you look at me so earnestly, my dear? Did you expect me to fly into a passion or fall into a fit? To what purpose? the deed is done and cannot be undone. If I were to cast those two young creatures from my heart, and never see them again, I should make myself miserable as well as them, without altering the state of the case in the least. Facts are stubborn things, Cecil, and pay no regard to feelings: besides,

in sober truth, there is only one person in this unfortunate business whom I cannot readily forgive, and that person is myself. My weakness has been the real cause of my son's disobedience and your sister's indiscretion; I have not done my duty towards either of them. And now I freely and entirely forgive them. Tell them so, Cecil, the moment you know where they are—bid them come to me—tell Grace that I will love her as a daughter—as I always have loved her; it is not in my nature to drive those I love from my side. My darling boy! if he is headstrong, whose fault is it? Oh! bid them come back to me, Cecil."

Cecil had neither expected a burst of passion nor a fit; she knew Lady Jane's self-control and sweetness of temper too well to fear either catastrophe; but neither did she expect so complete, so immediate a forgiveness, such an outpouring of love

without the alloy of one bitter sentiment. Not a word had Lady Jane uttered of disappointed hopes, thwarted plans, or frustrated wishes. She accepted the farmer's daughter for her son's wife, not only uncomplainingly, but joyfully. All her anxiety now, was to see them, to forgive them, to bless them. She already acknowledged Grace as her son's wife, and took her to her heart as a daughter.

As Cecil pursued her way back to Hollowhill she pondered, with gratitude and admiration, on this rare instance of human excellence. The beauty of Lady Jane's character had never appeared so bright to her. How utterly she discarded and cast from her the commonplace generalities in which small minds love to deal, and beneath which weak minds shelter themselves. Instead of indulging in empty platitudes; instead of descanting upon her

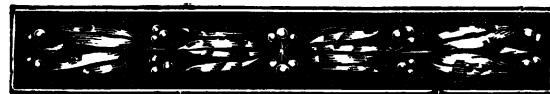
son's disobedience and Grace's ingratitude, which she might with truth have done; instead of hardening her heart, by dwelling upon the bad return she had received, and calling in the aid of pride to nurse her wrath, she called to her aid humility and Christian charity; in short, she nursed her love in place of her wrath.

Cecil had made no comment upon Grace's postscript, as Lady Jane did not appear to have been struck by it. Why make her uneasy, perhaps unnecessarily? And yet to Cecil's mind it was clear that the fugitives were intending to cross the sea, otherwise why Grace's alarm at the high wind? If she was right in her suspicion, then indeed Grace might well feel terrified—for it was blowing hard at the time they must have started, and the wind increased fearfully during the night.

At the same time that Cecil left Hollow-

hill for the Rookery, Rupert proceeded to Dummer to make inquiries; 'perhaps he may already have returned,' Cecil thought, as she hastened back. She felt so nervous, so unusually nervous; Grace's letter had frightened her; she could scarcely tell why or what she feared. She could not get the sad, pale face that had leant over her bed, out of her thoughts. She seemed ever to see those large, loving eyes and big tears, and to feel the tender pressure of the cold lips. A presentiment of coming evil clung to her, in spite of all her efforts to shake it off, and she hurried on so rapidly, that Catherine Doyle, though lithe of limb and stout of heart, could with difficulty keep pace with her.

This haste, as it proved, was unnecessary. When she reached Hollowhill, she found that Rupert had not yet returned from Dummer.



CHAPTER VIII.

ROCKMOOR CASTLE, AND WHAT HAPPENED THERE.



FORTNIGHT had elapsed, and yet not one word had been heard of the fugitives. All that Rupert had been able to ascertain at Dummer on the morning succeeding their flight, was that the *Saucy Sally* and the *Flukes* were missing. The little vessel was at her moorings at sundown the night before, no one had seen her sail, but in the morning she was gone. That Sir Charles Dimdale and Grace Meadows had gone in her, no one doubted; and few of the sea-going community but had grave misgivings as to their fate. It was blowing fresh when she must have left the harbour, and long before she could have

reached the other side of the water, the wind had increased fearfully—"A reg'lar snorter! enough to upset a dozen *Saucy Sallys*," as Dick Holder observed.

Never did Dick Holder scrutinize the sea more eagerly. Day after day, wet or dry, stormy or still, might he be seen on the highest "look-out" with glass in hand, searching for his friend's boat; and night by night he repaired to Hollowhill to give in his blank report.

"Oh, Kate," he said, "I've watched for that boat, before now, in hopes of catchin' her many a time, and I've bin after her when the sea washed our decks fore an' aft at every pitch, and I knowed that the *Sally* was full of tubs, and I'd have given a good deal to have got hold of her; but I'd give the vally of all the tubs as ever was landed, if I had it to give, this minute, to know as she was safe."

“But shure she was a good say-boat. I’ve often heard you say as much,” urged Kate; “and when the say was washing your decks that away, didn’t she live through it all, an’ get away from you?”

Dick Holder shook his head despondingly.

“She was a good seaboot for so small a craft; but lor bless you! she warn’t able to stand up agin such a gale as swept the Channel that night. Why, we’ve heard of over a dozen wrecks along this very coast in that same gale, an’ some of them big merchantmen of three or four hundred tons; you don’t suppose as that little boat of Bill’s could ever weather such a storm? No, no, the *Saucy Sally* has gone down; I try not to b’lieve it, but I know ‘tis so.”

And this gradually became the universal belief. The *Saucy Sally* must have foundered at sea; had she been wrecked on

the coast some portion of her, it was argued, would have been washed on shore.

Sick at heart was Lady Jane; and deeply and bitterly did she regret that she had not yielded to her son's entreaties. Her refusal had forced him to the desperate step he had taken, had, in fact, been the cause of his death. Right or wrong, her refusal had destroyed him, she could not shut her eyes to that fact.

And Cecil was if possible still more wretched. She had from the first fought against this marriage with all the impetuosity of her ardent nature. How she had argued with Grace, pleaded with her, nay, almost commanded her to give Sir Charles up! Was this right? was it called for? was it necessary? Why had she thought only of Lady Jane? why not have advocated her sister's cause? Had she done so with the same vehemence, the same

earnestness with which she had opposed it, who knows but that Lady Jane would have relented. And, after all, Grace was a lady in manner, in feeling, and by education, in everything except by birth; that was naturally an objection on the part of Lady Jane, indeed it was her only objection to the marriage, but why need she (Cecil) have taken up the matter so strongly? why, at all events, such active interference in opposing it? would not passive objection—neutrality—have been sufficient? She had harped upon the “ingratitude,” the “bad return” for all Lady Jane’s kindness, but were her sister’s feelings and affections, her sister’s happiness not to be taken into account? were they to be utterly ignored? It was Lady Jane’s fault that they loved each other—she it was who had thrown them together; Lady Jane had said so herself, and had said truly.

Sorely troubled was Cecil with these doubts and surmises. Had she acted from principle or from pride? She feared that pride had somewhat to do with her antagonism to the match; she had not been able to endure the idea of her sister entering a family which would look down upon her, despise her for the lowness of her origin. And now she was gone from her for ever! Her own, her only darling sister, whom she loved so dearly, whom she had promised her dying mother to protect and watch over, was no more. As the waves closed over her, as she sank down into the deep sea, did she—oh! did she—for one single instant, reproach her, Cecil, for her untimely death?

Again and again this harrowing thought occurred to Cecil. In the dark hours of the night she would lie awake, thinking of it. So young, so beautiful, so beloved, to go

down into the grave—an unknown and a watery grave—it was a fearful end! so sudden, so awfully sudden; in the midst of health and happiness: life and its joys just opening before her—strong in faith, and trust, and love, with the loved one by her side—to be whirled into eternity in an instant, without preparation, without warning!

Mr. Painter was the only person who clung to the belief that Grace still lived. He did not attempt to account for his belief, he merely persisted in it. The *Saucy Sally* had gone down most probably, but Grace had been saved, he felt sure of it.

Mr. Painter had again become a constant visitor at Hollowhill since Grace's elopement, and did his best to comfort Cecil and Mrs. Danger; but in this he was far from being successful. Cecil paid no attention

to his hopeful prophecies, and Dame Dorothy declared that “they aggravated her past all bearing.”

Time went on, and it was necessary for Rupert to return to his duties. Whether Sir Charles were living or dead, the property must be attended to, and he must go to Rockmoor Castle. Cecil of course would accompany him, and poor Dame Dorothy would be left alone with her husband and daughter, too dispirited by her sorrowful remembrances to have the heart to scold either of them.

Under a brusque and off-hand manner, Dame Dorothy concealed strong and tender feelings; she spoke little of Grace’s disappearance, or of her death, in which she firmly believed, but she felt it keenly. Those who make the greatest moan are by no means those who feel the keenest. Indeed experience teaches that, as a general

rule, deep feelings, like deep waters, are silent; my own estimation of a person's feelings is in an inverse ratio to the display made of them.

It was a sorrowful parting between Cecil and her Aunt; Cecil's eyes were tearless, but her heart was full, whilst her white and quivering lips bore silent witness to the sorrow within.

I believe it is a generally accepted axiom that suspense is worse than certainty, however dreadful the realization of our worst fears may be. I have always doubted the truth of this. Suspense engenders hope, certainty destroys it. Long protracted suspense is indeed hard to bear, and Cecil felt all its bitterness; she hoped against hope; she could not altogether share Mr. Painter's belief in Grace's existence, but she felt that it was possible she might still live, and this lingering hope she would not relin-

quish until her worst fears should be confirmed.

One evening in September, some time after Rupert had taken Cecil to Rockmoor Castle, they were strolling through the cornfields, which were being rapidly cleared of their golden produce, when Cecil said quietly and sadly, "This day six months they left Hollowhill."

"They have been at rest long since, dearest; do you not feel that it is so?"

"Reason tells me that it is, but there is a glimmer of hope still in my heart, a glimmer of unreason, I know you think it, and perhaps, nay probably, you are right, but I cannot—cannot bring my mind to put on a black dress yet."

Rupert made no reply; he felt as certain of Grace's death, as he did of his own existence, but he had not the heart to try to argue Cecil into the same belief. Pre-

sently he said, "Lady Jane has put on mourning for her son." Again they continued their walk in silence.

They had entered the park, and were passing a clump of old chestnuts, when a figure suddenly emerged from behind the trunk of a neighbouring tree. Cecil started violently—for an instant she thought she gazed upon an apparition, the next moment she clasped her sister in her arms.

"Oh, Cecil! Cecil! you do forgive me, and will love me still!" was the piteous cry.

"Love you, my darling—my darling! have you ever doubted it?" Wildly, passionately she strained her to her heart.

There was no reply, no response to her embrace; Grace had fainted.

Rupert lifted her in his arms and shuddered as he did so, she was so light, so attenuated: he carried her into the house, Cecil following like one in a dream. Was

it really Grace whom Rupert was carrying in his arms as he would carry a child? Why was she so thin, so ill? and why had she doubted her love? A painful suspicion crossed her mind. Had Grace stayed away fearing the reception she might meet with at home? was there anything worse than the elopement, anything more difficult to forgive?

As she bent over her sister, and watched her returning colour, and looked into her large, loving eyes, which smiled so calmly and so trustfully upon her, her doubts were dispelled, her question was answered. There was timidity in the glance she encountered, but not shame. She felt that there was nothing to conceal, and she blushed for the momentary wrong she had done her sister.

“Grace, my darling, I can scarcely believe the evidence of my senses; is this really you?”

“Oh! Cecil, I have so much to tell!—so much to tell!—such horrors!—such misery!”

“Not now, dear Grace,” said Rupert, kindly; “wait till to-morrow, you are not equal to it now.”

But Grace would not be denied; she was overcome, she said, at the first sight of Cecil, but she was better now, and would rather tell her tale at once.

“I am afraid to ask after Sir Charles,” whispered Cecil.

Grace's eyes dilated with terror, and a look of horror spread over her countenance.

Again they begged her to postpone her narrative, but she persisted in her resolution. She could not rest, she said, till all was told.

It was a sorrowful history, and many a time had Grace to stop to wipe away her tears, and recover her self-possession.

She told how the *Saucy Sally*, after gallantly struggling through the heavy seas which threatened every moment to overwhelm her, was eventually wrecked on the French coast. She herself was down below when the vessel was hurled upon the rocks with frightful violence. Charley, she said, had but just left her ; he had been in her cabin to try to cheer and comfort her, and had then joined the two Flukes on deck, and she never saw him again in life ! All three had doubtless been washed off the deck, immediately after the vessel struck. She—Grace—was thrown with much violence against the bulkheads of the cabin, and became insensible. When she recovered her consciousness, she found herself lying on a strange bed, with strange faces around her. The strange faces were those of the fisherman and his son who had rescued her, and of the elder man's wife and daughter, who

had warmed and chafed her into life again. From these good people she learnt that they had seen the *Saucy Sally* go on shore, but the fury of the waves was too great at the time to admit of their affording any assistance.

As day dawned, the wind had moderated, and the sea having gone down a little, though it still ran high, they managed, with great difficulty to get on board the craft, which they found firmly jammed between two rocks. The beating of the waves was rapidly breaking her up, and in less than an hour after the fisherman and his son had conveyed her, Grace, to a place of safety, the vessel went to pieces and disappeared in the raging vortex of waters. Neither Pierre Sabot nor his son Jaques had expected to find a living creature on board, and when they discovered her they were uncertain whether she still lived.

The bodies of the two Flukes were never

found, but that of Sir Charles Dimdale was washed on shore shortly after she herself had been rescued. No sooner had she recovered her consciousness and power of speech, than she asked eagerly for her lover. They told her that one body had been washed on shore. She insisted upon seeing it; they carried her into the adjoining room, and with feelings of horror and despair, she gazed upon the features of her dead lover. That sight, together with the injuries she had received, brought on fever, and for weeks she lay hovering between life and death. No doctor lived within many miles of that out-of-the-way place; and the curative skill of the fisherman's wife was her sole dependence. But youth is tenacious of life: strength of constitution, under the blessing of a merciful Providence, rescued her out of the very jaws of death. Mind and memory returned with returning health;

and now we will continue the narrative in her own words.

“ My first act, as soon as my strength permitted, was to write to you, dearest Cecil, for I found, to my dismay, that six weeks had elapsed since that dreadful night, and I well knew how anxious you must all be on my account. I received no reply to that letter; three wretched weeks of suspense I passed, and then I wrote again, more urgently than before, begging and praying that you or Rupert would come to me; still no answer. I waited and waited, till I thought I should have gone mad with suspense and fear, for I began to think you had all deserted me, cast me off, would have nothing more to do with me, and I was so utterly miserable and heart-broken, that I fell ill again, very, very ill. I thought I should die in that strange desolate place, with no one I loved near me. That thought

drove me mad, I suppose, for I raved of Charley, and of you, and of Lady Jane. I thought I saw you as I last saw you, when I kissed you in your sleep, and you opened your eyes and gazed so fixedly upon me. And Charley too, I saw—oh, so dreadful! so dreadful!"

The poor girl covered her face with her hands, and shook with horror at the harrowing recollection.

"Do not dwell upon that part of your story, dearest Grace," said Cecil, deeply moved; "but why did you not write to Lady Jane, or again to me?"

"I was afraid to write to Lady Jane—I could not, dared not, tell her what had happened; and indeed I had not courage to write again to you, for I thought you must have received my letters and disregarded them. Pierre told me that he posted them himself, in the little town of —,

fifteen miles from his home ; but you never *did* receive them, Cecil, or surely you would have answered them?"

" I should have flown to you without waiting to finish the reading of your letter — that is how I should have answered it. How could you doubt my love for one instant, oh ! how *could* you ?"

" I don't know ; but I was so broken down both in body and mind, and I could not account for your silence in any other way."

" How did you get home at last, dear Grace ? for you must have been penniless," said Rupert.

" No, I was not, Rupert ; I had plenty of money. Pierre and Jaques, when they rescued me, saved also the box containing our money. I have spent very little of it, for of course it belongs to Lady Jane

now—but we can repay her you know, Rupert."

Grace looked so hopelessly miserable when she said this, that Rupert turned his head aside to conceal his emotion. Cecil's eyes were streaming, and her heart aching as it never had ached before.

"I cannot bear to think of all you have suffered, and I not near you," sobbed Cecil. "I *could* not cease to love you, Grace, and you will never doubt my love again, will you?"

"Never—oh! never again, Cecil," murmured Grace, turning her beautiful loving eyes upon her sister.

"Ah, Rupert," said Cecil, presently, "was not my heart a true prophet? In spite of apparent impossibilities, I clung to the hope that you were alive, Grace. Reason said you were dead; Love said you were alive—and I believed Love. Yes, and

I trusted in the mercy and goodness of God. 'Surely,' I thought, 'He will not punish me so fearfully!' For, had you been taken from me, I could never have forgiven myself—never could I have known peace or happiness again. The feeling that I, by my harsh judgment—by my determined resistance to your wishes and your love, had driven you to your grave, would have haunted me to mine."

" You only did what you thought was right, and what, no doubt, *was* right, dearest Cecil; and I know I was wrong, after all I had promised you, to meet Charley as I did; and more wrong still to run away with him; but—but—I loved him so dearly."

With that piteous cry, Grace broke down, sobbing hysterically.

Her grief was so violent and so long continued, that Cecil became alarmed; more especially as Grace was far too ill

and too weak to bear with impunity so great a strain upon her nervous system, which had been already tried most severely. Through the whole of that night, Grace was either delirious or unconscious. Her thoughts were running upon the dreadful night at sea, and the subsequent sight of Sir Charles's dead body.

“I want to go upon deck! I *must* go upon deck!” she cried, struggling to rise. “Listen to the wind and the waves—how they roar! Charley is on deck, and I *will* go to him. Why do you hold me?—let me go—let me go! Charley—Charley! oh! come to me!—they are strangling me, the waves; and, oh! I am choking! I am drowning—I am—am.” And then she would sink into unconsciousness, that would last for nearly an hour; and then again fresh ravings. Now she would take Rupert for her lost lover—now Cecil.

“The sea! the sea!” she would scream out, “the terrible sea! it is rushing into the cabin! Oh! Charley—Charley! come to me! come to me!—oh! save me! save me!”

It was a fearful night for Rupert and for Cecil, a night they never forgot. More than once they thought she was gone, she lay so long motionless and breathless. But at length she sank to sleep, a sleep sound and unbroken for many hours.

When she awoke, which was not until late in the afternoon, a strange face was looking upon her. Rupert, Cecil and a stranger were by her bed-side; and the stranger had his hand upon her wrist.

“Who are you?” were the first words Grace uttered.

“I am Dr. Archibald Donald, my dear

young lady. Mrs. Vicars, give her the cordial at once, if you please."

Cecil did as she was bid; and Grace drank off the cordial without a word.

Cecil leant over and kissed her.

Grace smiled, turned her face to the pillow, and was asleep again immediately.

"She will do well now, Mrs. Vicars," said the Doctor; "her physical powers have been nearly exhausted—nearly worn out altogether, but another six hours' sleep will set her a' right again, puir lassie. So she is your sister, Mrs. Vicars; weel—weel—any one could tell that by the likeness."

"You are quite satisfied with her, Doctor, are you? You are sure she is in no danger? Last night was such a terrible night—over and over again I thought—I thought—"

"Hoot—toot! 'let bygones be by-

gones ;' last night is awa', and the danger—if there was any—along with it. Don't distress yourself, my good leddy, your sister is in no more danger than you are yourself. She is suffering, as I have already told you, from utter and complete exhaustion, baith of body and mind. And no wonder, considering what she went through that night at sea you spoke of, and the dreadful death of puir Sir Charles, a'most before her face, as one might say."

"Oh ! I am so glad to hear you speak cheerfully, Doctor ; I have been so miserable." And Cecil broke utterly down and wept for joy, as she had never wept for grief.

"Greet awa'—greet awa'—my dear leddy ;" the Doctor when excited became intensely national. "It is pleasant to see tears of joy, sae often do I see tears of sorrow. And now I'll be off, for I've ither

folk to attend to, though you mayn't think it," he added, with a sly glance at Cecil.

"Of course I know you have no one to attend to but Grace," said Cecil, smiling through her tears; "and so, perhaps, you will come back to dinner, Doctor, after you have had your drive."

"I will call to-morrow morning at ten o'clock; joking apart, I cannot come sooner, and it is not at all necessary that I should. And so keep your mind easy, and your sister quiet—and 'the mixture as before,' till our next meeting."

And shaking Cecil's hand warmly, the good old Doctor started for a twenty miles' drive over hill and moor, over 'flood and fell,' to visit those who had naught but thanks to give, in return for his medicines and his advice.

Doctor Archibald Donald makes his appearance too late in the *Chronicles of*

Hollowhill to allow of my doing him justice. Nevertheless, I will say this of him: Wheresoever sickness, poverty, or distress were rife, there was Dr. Donald to be found. Fees from the rich, he always took, fees from the poor, never. His professional district was very large, and, in places, very wild; and, many a time in winter, had Dr. Donald faced the storm, the sleet, and the cutting north wind, through the mountain gorges, or across the wild heath, upon an errand of mercy—of mercy without reward in this world. For forty years Dr. Donald had lived at Dunwaddie, a small town upon the coast of Ross-shire, some six miles from Rockmoor Castle. For forty years he had had the sole medical charge of an enormous district, of the extent of which we in England can have no conception. Our ideas of distance must necessarily be curtailed by fields of

twenty acres, by thick hedges and lofty trees. In the Highlands of Scotland, for acres, read miles—for hedges, mountains. True, the population amidst the wastes and wilds around Dunwaddie was very limited; Dr. Donald's patients amongst the mountains were not many, but they were far between. A long, wearisome road it was to these shanties, and in dark, stormy winter nights, even dangerous. And yet Dr. Donald had more than once during the past winter, and he in his sixty-seventh year, ridden twenty miles through the dark and the pelting rain, and the tearing wind, over wastes, and across mountains, where the apology for a road was scarcely visible a yard before him.

To visit a dying man was the Doctor's object; not with the hope of saving his life—he had no such hope; no thought of professional *éclat* buoyed him up through

the dreary and toilsome journey. But he could alleviate his sufferings, he could lull the bodily pain. And more than that, he could, and did, by his kind sympathy and friendly talk, bring much comfort to the poor man's mind. And a poor man, indeed, was Duncan Græme, in more senses than one. A common shepherd, living in a small hut, scarcely worthy the name even of 'cabin,' his sole companions, his colley dog and his granddaughter. A man who scarcely earned a bare competency, though often toiling from early morning till late at night at his vocation. This man, of but average intelligence and limited education, was nevertheless treated by Dr. Donald as a friend, upon perfect terms of equality.

Dr. Donald knew that consumption had fixed its deadly fangs in the breast of Duncan Græme, and that it could not be

long ere the fell disease claimed its prey. Was this a time for insisting upon social distinctions? for standing upon his dignity? upon his learning, his erudition, his superior abilities? What would they all avail him in the place towards which Duncan Græme was hurrying? And thus it came to pass that the excellent Doctor sat by Duncan's bedside, with the sick man's hand in his, amusing, instructing, soothing, and comforting him, as a Christian brother *should* do, but does not do—always.

* * * *

Pray, kind reader, excuse this totally inexcusable digression; it was altogether unintentional, and has nothing whatever to do with the story I am telling you; it is, in fact, "*nihil ad rem*"—a remark, by-the-bye, the reverse of complimentary when written across one's "*vulgaris*"—a remark which many a time and oft, I grieve to say, it was

my unhappy lot, when a cricketing Commoner at Winchester, to see branded upon my choicest Latin compositions. Not often enough, I am afraid, to break me of the evil habit of writing wide of the mark.

* * * *

Return we to Rockmoor and its inmates. A good night's rest seemed to put fresh life into Grace; feeble, and weak and worn, she still was, but her mind was placid, and her brain was quiet. Cecil was everything to her, not only the kindest, the most gentle, and most indefatigable of nurses, but the wisest of counsellors also.

Cecil's strong sense and excellent judgment were of the utmost service to her poor, weak, terrified sister, when she sobbed and grieved for Charley Dimdale, as it was but natural she should sob and grieve. Cecil did not attempt to stop her, did not argue with her, did not chide her, but she wept with

her and soothed her, and bade her try to fix her thoughts upon the peaceful present and the hopeful future.

“ You have been sorely tried, darling, for one so young, very, very sorely tried; but depend upon it, He who sent the trial sent it in love—sent it for your good. Your cross has been laid upon you early in life; but, believe me, strength will be given you to bear it. Oh! Grace! trust to God for strength to bear this trial—trust to His heavenly love first, and next to my earthly love to comfort you!”

And Grace would throw herself into her sister’s arms and weep herself to sleep.

Dr. Donald arrived at Rockmoor punctually at ten o’clock, and this was his report to Cecil:

“ Your sister, Mrs. Vicars, has gone through enough to destroy both body and mind, but youth, a fine constitution, and

your judicious kindness, will, I have no sort of doubt, mak a new man of her—woman I should say. She will do well enough now; but you must na let her dwell more than you can help upon that fearsome night. It's little more I can do for her, but it's much you can and will, I am sure of that. Keep her quiet, and keep her amused, and you may trust me that in time—an' it must take time—she will be a' right again, and as blythe and bonnie as you would wish to see her."

"Bonnie she will always be; but never blythe again, I fear," said Cecil, sadly.

"Hoot! toot! 'never' is a vera long word, my dear leddy; but Time often shortens him, and he will now. Only you must na hurry him. You must give Time time. Do ye ken?"

"I do ken, dear Dr. Donald, and I will try to believe and to trust——"

"You'll no try, but you just *will*, believe what I say, for it's true. And now one word of advice, tho' it's little you need any. Talk upon every subject you can think of to your sister, except the sea; wean her thoughts, little by little, from dwelling upon that awfu' night."

"I will," said Cecil; and so they parted.

It was impossible for Cecil at first to steer clear of the sea in her conversations with Grace. She would return again and again to the subject, which as a matter of course, was ever uppermost in her mind; and so Cecil humoured her, and asked her about her residence in the French fisherman's cabin, and how she managed upon her journey, all alone, and so ill as she was.

"And Grace, dear, where did you drop from into the chestnut grove? How did you find your way to Rockmoor?—there

was no carriage at the Castle, and your luggage——”

Cecil stopped abruptly, colouring with vexation. She had forgotten that Grace could have taken little or no luggage with her on the night she left Hollowhill. But Grace's thoughts were not upon her elopement, but upon the shipwreck.

“I came in a chaise, or a fly, or something, from Dunwaddie,” she said, “and I had only a small bundle of things, which Pierre's wife bought for me; everything, except that box with our money in it, was lost with the boat, you know. And some one told me that you and Rupert were out walking, and pointed towards those trees; and when I reached them, I saw you both coming towards me. And oh! Cecil, I was so nervous—so dreadfully nervous. I know it was very foolish. I ought never to have doubted your love; but I was so weak, and—and——”

"And I had always been such a tyrant, you thought I should beat you," said Cecil, kissing her, and laughing in her face.

Grace laughed too, and clung to Cecil and looked into her eyes, where such deep tender love was dancing joyously; and her poor trembling heart, which had begun to flutter and to sink, rose once more and beat calmly and tranquilly.

"And to what place did you cross from the fisherman's cabin? Tell me everything."

Grace had little more to tell. Her repeated relapses, she said, had weakened her to such a degree that she was physically unable to undertake the journey home until about a week previous to her arrival. She had crossed to Dummer from the nearest seaport. But she had not gone to Hollowhill, being afraid to encounter Dame Dorothy; and having heard that

Rupert and Cecil were at Rockmoor, she determined upon proceeding thither as fast as her strength would permit, having first despatched a letter to Lady Jane acquainting her with the melancholy intelligence of her son's death, and imploring her forgiveness for being the unhappy cause of the sad fate that had overtaken him. To this letter Grace, soon after her arrival at Rockmoor, received a reply. It was a long epistle, full of affection and forgiveness, of thankfulness that she had been preserved, and of resignation to the Almighty will. "It was I, not you," wrote Lady Jane, "who forced my beloved Charley to his death; I was too proud to receive you as a daughter, and God has punished me by taking away my son. I recognise the justice, and I think I see the meaning of the sentence. From this moment I adopt Cecil and you for my

daughters. I am childless, except in your love. Come to me, my children—come to your future home, and come quickly, for this blow has been almost too much for my strength, and I yearnt to see you once more."

The Dimdale title and property descended to a cousin of the late Baronet, of whom rumour did not speak in the most flattering terms. He was said to be overbearing, and much given to drink and bad language. Rupert would therefore, under any circumstances, have given up the agency of the estates, and he did so the more willingly on the receipt of Lady Jane's letter, though neither he nor Cecil realized the extent of her liberal intentions towards them until after their arrival at the Rookery; to which place they journeyed by easy stages as soon as Grace was fit to move.

They found Lady Jane sadly aged in appearance. It was not many months since

they had seen her, but sorrow had done the work of time. She was greatly affected at first by the sight of Grace, who brought her poor lost boy so vividly before her, but she had schooled herself to the task of meeting, and in a few days she so far conquered her feelings as to be able to listen to Grace's melancholy history, and to learn from her lips the place of his interment and the name of the churchyard in which he had been laid.

Rupert, Cecil, and Grace had been a week at the Rookery, and no word had Lady Jane spoken as to her future intentions towards her adopted daughters.

Rupert began to tire of an idle life: he ought to be looking out for employment, he said, it was his duty to do something towards supporting his wife. The idea of living on Lady Jane's bounty, until her death, was distasteful to him, even if such

was her intention, of which he was uncertain. But at all events they would have to look out for themselves after her death; the legacy which no doubt she would bequeath to Cecil, would be most acceptable, but they would want a home when she was gone, as they would, as a matter of course, have to leave the Rookery. Lady Jane was proud of the Dimdale family, and naturally would leave the bulk of her own property, to go with the Irish estates, to the new Baronet. A farm would suit him, there was one in the neighbourhood to let, he knew; he would speak to Lady Jane on the subject.

He did speak, that same afternoon, as they were all seated under one of the large acacia trees, whose gnarled and rugged trunk bore evidence of its great antiquity.

“ You are very ambitious, Rupert,” said

her ladyship. "I should have thought that the management of this estate would have been employment enough for you, without the trouble and care of another farm; you know the extent of this property?"

"About two thousand acres, Lady Jane, is it not?"

"Quite right, Rupert; and you could, if you pleased, take the home farm entirely under your own management, keeping Curlew on as your bailiff or not, as you thought best."

Rupert did not exactly understand her ladyship. "Is Curlew going to leave?" he asked.

"That is as you wish. I have spoken to him on the subject, and he was very reasonable about it, as I knew he would be, for he is a good creature. Indeed it was his own proposal to leave me. He said you would naturally like to take the manage-

ment of the property, that is eventually to be your own, into your own hands, and that two head men, as he called it, were certainly unnecessary."

"The property that is eventually to be mine, Lady Jane!"

"Well, Cecil's then—it's the same thing, I imagine. Why, what are you all looking so astonished about? did I not tell you my intentions in my letter to Grace?"

"You said that you would adopt Grace and me as your daughters, dear Lady Jane, and that we were henceforth to consider the Rookery as our home," replied Cecil; "but of course we supposed that it would only be our home so long as you lived."

"And that at my death you were to be turned adrift on the world, Cecil? with perhaps a thousand pounds apiece to buy a mourning ring! No, no, that is not my

idea of adoption. I ought to have made known my intentions more clearly. I thought I had done so, but I was stunned, stupefied, by the heavy blow which had fallen upon me."

Lady Jane paused to recover her composure: the thought that she was childless was at times almost more than she could bear. No one spoke, but Cecil and Grace drew closer to her side, and each taking a hand, kissed it affectionately.

Lady Jane looked up and smiled her own loving smile. "God bless you, my children!" she said; "your love is very precious to me. And now I will tell you what indeed I thought I had told you before. I have made my will, and have divided my property equally between you. This house, and the estate with it, I have left to you, Cecil. To Grace I have left all my funded property, which, owing to

the quiet way in which I have lived here so long, is at least equal in value to this estate. There, no thanks, I won't hear a word—whoever heard of children thanking their mother for their bread? Come and kiss me. And now leave me, dears; I want to speak to Rupert on business matters."

Lady Jane had a long conversation with Rupert as to the management of the estate, which she wished to be henceforth entirely in his hands. Perhaps some might think, she said, that she ought to have left the Rookery and the landed property to Grace, in consideration of her engagement to her son; she hoped Grace would not be hurt at her having disposed of it otherwise: the fact was, she loved the Rookery so dearly that she did not like to leave it to uncertain hands. Grace would of course marry in time; and she could not bear to think of her dear old home being mis-

managed or neglected, which might be the case if Grace's husband should be unaccustomed to a country life or country pursuits. She knew that Rupert was both able and willing to take care of the property—she could leave it confidently with him.

Whether Lady Jane had Mr. Painter in her mind's eye at the time, who can say? Certainly, if she had, she was authorized in fearing that her beloved estate might fall into unskilful hands, for Mr. Painter was as innocent as a child of any agricultural lore. And Lady Jane had yet another reason for disposing of her property as she had done, which she withheld even from Rupert. She scarcely liked to acknowledge to herself that she loved Cecil more than Grace, but she did love her more, and always had done so.



CHAPTER IX.

GRACE'S BIRTHDAY GIFT.

ET us suppose six years to have passed since the instalment of Rupert Vicars and the sisters at the Rookery, and let us listen to a conversation between Lady Jane and Cecil. I doubt not it will throw some light upon certain circumstances in which you, dear reader, are I hope interested.

The time is between 8.30 and 9 A.M.; the day of the month the 21st of June. The place: the breakfast-room. Scene: a hissing urn, a placid white hen sitting upon eggs she never laid, large loaves of home-made bread, small French rolls (equally home-

made), a silver cow upon a glass meadow containing lovely pats of butter, and all the *etceteras* of a country breakfast, waiting evidently for some one to eat them.

Lady Jane *loquitur*: "And, if I am right in my surmise, I hope it may come to pass."

Lady Jane was very pale when she said this; but she spoke distinctly and firmly.

"Dear Lady Jane," replied Cecil, after a moment's pause, "you are always thinking of our happiness, never of your own. I fear if it did come to pass it would pain you greatly."

"You are mistaken, my dear; it would give me pleasure. Of course there are some things one never can forget, and no doubt the marriage of Grace with Mr. Painter would open afresh old wounds;— would bring back bitter memories to me.

But am I on that account to set my face *a second time* against her inclinations? God forbid!" she continued, after a short pause, her voice slightly trembling. "I have had a hard lesson to learn, Cecil; but I trust and think I have learnt, it by heart. I have the greatest regard for Mr. Painter. I know him to be an excellent, high-principled man—a man of sound good sense into the bargain—the very man of all others to make Grace happy, and her happiness means my happiness. I am quite in earnest when I say that it would give me pleasure to see Grace married to Mr. Painter."

"I am so glad, dearest Lady Jane—so very, very glad to hear you say this; for I know you mean all you say, and the fear that this marriage might pain you has been the only drawback to my pleasure in looking forward to its possibly taking place."

“‘Possibly?’ Probably you mean, my dear.”

“As far as Mr. Painter is concerned, ‘certainly,’ would be the word,” said Cecil; “but I don’t fancy that Grace would allow more than ‘possibly,’ if she allowed even that.”

“Why? What *can* you mean, Cecil? Are you blind, child? Don’t you see that Grace is almost as much in love with Mr. Painter as he is with her?”

“Not quite *that*, I think; but still Grace certainly does care for him.”

“Yes; ‘quite that.’ A girl does not show her affection as plainly as a man does. It was because I saw that Grace’s affections were deeply engaged that I determined to—that I, in short, began to accustom myself to think of her marriage with Mr. Painter as a thing that was to be—as an affair that I, of all people, had no business to interfere

with; no business, at all events, to attempt to stop."

Lady Jane looked pale and distressed, as she always looked when the loss of her son was brought more vividly than usual before her; for she never ceased to accuse herself in her heart for having, by her resistance to his marriage with Grace, driven him to his doom.

"Had Mr. Painter's affections," continued Lady Jane, "alone been engaged, I am afraid I could not have forwarded his cause. I am very selfish; I cannot reconcile myself to losing Grace even yet—she seems to me a part of my boy. But there! I forget—there must be no more dismal memories to-day. We must all be merry and wise in honour of the dear child's birthday."

"And here comes the 'dear child' of twenty-five!" said Cecil, laughing, as Grace

stepped through the window from the lawn, looking as blooming, as fresh, and as fair as the roses she carried in her hands. "Many, many happy returns of the day," were showered upon her, and many a kiss was given and received. When lo! the window was again darkened, and Rupert Vicars and Mr. Painter joined the party.

It was not the first time Mr. Painter had breakfasted at the Rookery during that summer; therefore, although that gentleman's sudden appearance and unceremonious ingress may surprise you, dear reader, it did not in the least surprise Lady Jane. Indeed Mr. Painter had been *l'ami de la maison* for some two years or more; he was working out the fulfilment of his own prophecy with patient perseverance.

"I have been out ever since six o'clock," said Grace, *à propos* to nothing, and talking

fast, "and I have had such a lovely walk with Rupert, and—"

"With Painter," put in Rupert, with a sly smile.

"Over the heath," continued Grace, entirely ignoring Rupert's remark, "almost as far as Hollowhill. We saw Aunt Dorothy, but she didn't see us; she was beating something. What did you say it was, Rupert?"

"Jane, I think."

"Nonsense; it was a rug or a blanket, or—"

"Exactly so," said Rupert, "a wet Jane blanket."

"How foolish you are, Rupert," laughed Grace. "Blankets are never made of Jane; are they, Cecil?"

"Dry blankets are not, dear; I can't positively say as to wet ones."

There was a general laugh, which Grace

declared was "a great shame," though she joined in it nevertheless.

"I am so hungry," she said presently, with the most unromantic emphasis, considering that she was supposed to be in love, and her lover close beside her.

"I am delighted to hear it," said the matter-of-fact Mr. Painter. "What shall I give you, Grace?"

"By-the-by, Grace," said Rupert, "you have not shown Lady Jane and Cecil what Painter has already given you this morning."

The roses in Grace's cheek deepened perceptibly.

"Oh, no! I quite forgot—at least I didn't think of it, I was so——"

"Hungry," suggested Cecil.

"Yes, so hungry," accepted innocent Grace. "Look, dear Lady Jane; isn't it lovely?"

"It is indeed, my dear, both beautiful and singular; it looks like a picture of something—enamel and diamonds, is it not, Mr. Painter?"

"Yes, Lady Jane; the ring is made of enamel and a few insignificant diamonds; its intrinsic value is very small, but—"

"But," exclaimed Cecil—who had been diligently examining the ring, and who now looked up, her face aglow with pleasure and surprise—"but you think it quite possible, Mr. Painter, that the time may come when this ring may be valued for other reasons than for what it is worth in the market?"

"I hope so, Cecil; at all events, what do *you* think?"

"Ah! I shall not tell you what *I* think? Here, Grace, take your ring and put it into your pocket." Cecil's face was beaming

with a pleasure she could with difficulty suppress.

Rupert looked from one to the other. With the usual obtuseness of his superior sex he could make nothing of it. Of course he knew that Painter was in love with Grace, and had been for a dozen years, more or less; but he also knew that this was by no means the first present Painter had given her—not even the first ring. What could there be in this particular ring to cause Cecil's strange speech and radiant face? Why did Painter look so knowing, and exchange meaning glances with Cecil? And why, ever since the ring was produced, was Grace, who had previously been talking twenty to the dozen, mute as a fish?

“Let's have a look at this wonderful ring before you pocket it; though why you don't put it on your finger I can't imagine.”

Grace gave him the ring, merely observing, "I showed it to you before, Rupert."

"True for you; and now show it to me behind, for I am suddenly determined to find out the mystery."

Rupert examined the ring, both front and back, most carefully.

"I can make nothing of it," he said; "there's your ring, Grace; but why, if it is not an indiscreet question, do not you place it on your finger instead of in your pocket?"

"A whim of mine, Rupert," said Mr. Painter. "I asked Grace to let *me* put the ring on her finger, and begged her to be good enough to keep it in her pocket till—till I was ready."

"Till you were ready! Why ain't you ready now?"

"I can't tell you why, but I ain't."

"Well, when you are, let me know,

there's a good fellow ; I wouldn't miss the ceremony for a trifle. Upon my word this is as good as a play ; I shall expect to see you transformed into a fairy at the very least, Grace—Queen Mab possibly. By-the-bye, shall you rub it, Painter, before you put it on—to invoke the slave of the ring, you know?"

"It won't be necessary; the slave will be close to the ring when the ceremony takes place, quite within call."

This was rather too plain to be misunderstood either by Rupert or Grace; but no great importance was attached to the observation by either of them, as Mr. Painter had never made any secret of his affection for Grace, although he had not actually spoken to her of his love since the death of Sir Charles.

Thus it was that Grace, not having discovered the true meaning of the ring, which

would at once have opened her eyes to the coming proposal, had no notion that a proposal was imminent. No notion, at all events, how closely united were the birthday gift and the betrothment. Grace, it is true, had been struck by a difference, difficult to define but easy to perceive, in Mr. Painter's manner towards her that morning. It was not only that he was more than ordinarily attentive to her; but there was an unusual tenderness in his voice, a beseeching look in his eyes, and more than all these, a restlessness, an agitation in all he said and did, that could not but strike her as peculiar, being so contrary to his usual calm self-possession. Grace, having arrived at the mature age of five-and-twenty years, interpreted these signs with tolerable correctness; hence the rapidity of her utterance when she first made her appearance through the drawing-room window;

hence also—strange though it may appear—her subsequent taciturnity. Still she had no idea that her fate was so near at hand.

No sooner had Grace, Mr. Painter, and Rupert left the room after breakfast, by different doors and windows, to reunite by some hocus-pocus on the lawn, than Lady Jane attacked Cecil for the information she was on thorns to obtain.

“My dear Cecil, for mercy’s sake, expound to me the riddle of the ring. You seemed all of you to be bewitched; some with joy, some with confusion. What does it all mean?”

“You looked at the ring, dear Lady Jane; did you see nothing peculiar in it?”

“No, nothing at all, except as I said at the time, that it looked like a picture.”

“And it *is* a picture,” said Cecil, her whole face radiant with joy; “a picture I have been longing to see for a long time:

it is a picture of Grace's engagement with Mr. Painter."

"My dear Cecil, what *do* you mean?"

"I will explain as well as I can," said Cecil, still on "the broad grin," as Dame Dorothy would have said. "You saw that the ring was composed of a band of enamel of different colours—dark blue at each end, and an oblong bit in the centre the colour of steel or glass?"

"I saw the different-coloured enamels, but I could not describe them as accurately as you do, my dear; no doubt you are right, but what of that?"

"Wait a moment, please: did you observe a small piece of black enamel studded with diamonds, suspended by two wee gold chains from the oblong piece of enamel that I have likened to glass?"

"Yes, I saw that, and a very pretty ornament I thought it. But now, what

did all these bits of different-coloured enamels represent? Grace's engagement, I think you said; but how you are going to make that out, my dear, is still a mystery to me."

Cecil clapped her hands, and kissed Lady Jane so vehemently, and laughed so immoderately, that her ladyship thought she had taken leave of her senses.

"I beg your pardon, dear Lady Jane, for nearly pulling you to pieces, but I am so happy I scarcely know what I am doing. Dearest Grace! at last she will be happy too."

"I declare, Cecil, if you don't tell me this minute the meaning of all this madness, I'll box your ears," said Lady Jane, holding up a very small hand in a most threatening attitude, which hand Cecil seized, and took possession of, "to prevent mischief," as she said.

"Oh! don't beat me! and I will tell you all!" cried Cecil. She *could not* be serious, she was so brimming over with delight.

Lady Jane shook her head at her. "You mad thing! *will* you go on? I have another hand, remember."

"Pardon, pardon! sweet lady, and list to the riddle of the ring. The broad band of particoloured enamel represents a railway carriage, the dark blue being the carriage, the light glass-like centre the window."

"Bless my heart!" cried Lady Jane, "does that mean he is going to run away with her?"

A shadow passed over her countenance as she said this, for the memory of that other fatal running away was before her.

"Oh, no, no!" exclaimed Cecil, eagerly, for she saw the shadow plain enough. "Nothing of the sort—much better than

that. You said you remembered the piece of black enamel all over diamonds pendant from the centre?" Lady Jane nodded assent. "That piece of black enamel represents the board hung on a carriage window when the carriage is taken, and the diamonds form the word *Engaged*.

Lady Jane was electrified. "Good gracious, Cecil, you don't say so! Grace engaged, and not to have told me! I think she might have told me."

"Dearest Lady Jane, she is not engaged yet. Grace knows nothing about this ring riddle—I could see that plain enough; and I never should have found it out myself if I had not, whilst examining the ring, caught Mr. Painter's eye fixed on me with a very significant look in it, as much as to say, 'Find it out if you can.' I instantly renewed my scrutiny with greater care, and all at once the word

formed by the diamonds flashed upon me. But it is very minute; I am not at all surprised at Grace not seeing it. No one would have seen it who did not suspect there was something to find out; and now, of course, I know that Mr. Painter has plucked up courage, and means to propose this very day; and Grace will accept him, for she loves him, as she ought to love him. Never was a man so tender and so true as Mr. Painter has been for years and years. If any man deserves reward for constancy, Mr. Painter does."

"He does indeed, my dear; and God knows I don't grudge him his reward;—it is true, Cecil, in spite of the tears you see in my foolish old eyes. So you think Mr. Painter will put the ring on this very day? I daresay he wont tell her what it means till it is on, and then Grace will find she is 'engaged' without knowing it.

I am rather surprised that Mr. Painter——
but, however, it's no matter."

Cecil knew well to what Lady Jane alluded. She too thought Mr. Painter ought to have spoken to Lady Jane, even if he did not think it necessary to ask her consent; she wished he *had* spoken; it was unlike him not to do this. "Think of Mr. Painter, and he appears," muttered Cecil to herself, as the gentleman aforesaid entered the room.

He went straight up to Lady Jane, and took her hand.

"Cecil has told you what she discovered with those sharp eyes of hers, Lady Jane, has she not?"

"She has, and I am very glad." The words seemed to choke her, though they were true enough; but oh! the last time she was asked for her consent to Grace's marriage!

“I mean to-day,” continued Mr. Painter, “with your permission, to ask Grace to be my wife; but, dear Lady Jane, although I have given her an engaged ring, never will I put it on her finger without your permission to do so; neither would Grace, I am certain, allow me to place it there without your consent and your blessing.”

“You have both—you have both, from my heart, Mr. Painter, and God speed your wooing.” Lady Jane was herself again—no symptoms of distress remained; she had conquered self, as she often had done before; she would not, for worlds, mar their happiness by allowing them to see how her heart bled, as the wretched, miserable past surged up before her.

But Lady Jane’s struggle for composure did not pass unheeded by Mr. Painter. He saw and knew well how painful any

re-engagement of Grace must, of necessity, be to her. But he had too much tact and too much feeling to recur to the sad cause of the pain, further than by pressing her hand warmly, and saying fervently:

“God bless you, dear Lady Jane, for your kindness to Grace and to me.”

She returned the pressure, and smiled her own sweet smile upon him; but she could not speak.

Cecil therefore—the ever-ready Cecil—in racing phraseology, “took up the running.” “Where is your lady-love all this time, Mr. Painter? Don’t you think she will feel aggrieved if you stay away from her any longer? You have not put the wonderful ring on yet, remember!”

“Ah, Cecil!” said Mr. Painter, seriously, “how cruel you are! I know I have not put that ring on yet, and I sometimes fear I never shall succeed in doing so. If you

only knew how I dread the chance of a refusal. At times I think she *does* care for me, and then again I feel sure she does not."

"Well, go and ask her, that's my advice," said Cecil, laughing; "or rather, stay and ask her, for here she comes."

"Oh, Mr. Painter!" exclaimed Grace, starting slightly as she entered by the "right of way" window, "I thought you and Rupert had gone for a walk."

"Well, we did go—a—a little way," stammered Mr. Painter.

The "little way" being, to the stables for Rupert, the drawing-room for himself. But a diversion was about to take place in Mr. Painter's favour—in his favour, that is to say, as far as his most transparent fiction of a walk with Rupert was concerned.

The door of the drawing-room burst

suddenly open, and in rushed Cecil's two darlings — two young ladies of the advanced ages of three and five. Gracey, the youngest, and by far the fattest child, rushed with unerring instinct to Lady Jane, exclaiming *in alto*, “Gran'ma, me want sugar-plum, please.”

Cecil's children—*par parenthèse*—were instructed by Lady Jane herself to call her “grandmamma.”

Meanwhile Jeanie, the eldest hope, had seized hold of Grace's dress, at which she tugged violently, pouring forth a continuous cry of “Aunt Gracey — Aunt Gracey — Aunt Gracey!”

“Aunt Gracey” happened, at the moment, to be listening to Mr. Painter's invitation to go out on the lawn, and she did not immediately pay attention to the child's importunities; but when at length she did pay attention, and stooping towards her,

said, "Well, Jeanie, darling, what is it?" Jeanie darling bawled out at the top of her by no means weak voice—"Aunt Gracey, is it true Mr. Painter wants to marry you?"

A dead silence followed this terrible infantine remark. Grace simply turned crimson, and said never a word. Lady Jane and Cecil, looking horrified and helpless, were equally taken aback. But Mr. Painter—timid, nervous Mr. Painter—was equal to the occasion. He snatched Miss Jeanie up in his arms, exclaiming with ready wit, "It's you I want to marry, Jeanie; wont you be my little wife?"

"Yes," said the child, with true feminine instinct; "but nurse said you wanted to marry—"

"Ah, nurse knows nothing about it!" said Mr. Painter, retreating rapidly with

Miss Jeanie still in his arms, to the safe distance of the lawn.

“What very inconvenient questions children ask sometimes!” observed Lady Jane, when the fat, sugar-plum-loving Gracey had, by Cecil’s directions, followed her sister.

“Dreadfully inconvenient,” said Cecil, scarcely able to keep her countenance.

Grace meantime was standing with her back to the other two ladies, diligently turning over various books which lay scattered upon the table before her.

“Oh, here it is at last!” she said, in a tone of satisfaction that deceived no one. And incontinently she too vanished through the window, book in hand. Not, however, to join the game of romps on the lawn, but to follow a winding path amongst thick evergreens to the very extremity of the grounds, to rush into a summer-house, to

throw herself upon the seat, to cover her burning face with her hands, and to think of the "*enfant terrible*" and its terrible question "before his very face!" as she kept repeating to herself.

Grace had not long enjoyed the luxury of her own thoughts, when a footstep she knew well was heard approaching. Her first idea was to escape: she rose for the purpose, but it was too late. Mr. Painter was close at hand; it would not do to run away with his eyes upon her, "to mark the way she took." So she sat down again, to await her fate, pretending to be deeply occupied in her book, which chanced to be an abridged edition of "Walker's Dictionary," held upside down, but in reality listening to the beating of her heart, which she fancied Mr. Painter must certainly hear.

In another moment Mr. Painter was before her, with her hand in his, and his

tongue (loosened at last) pouring forth the deep, earnest, passionate love which, for her sake, he had so long and with so much difficulty restrained.

“I have never ceased to love you, Grace, from the time I first declared my love to you; never for an instant—not even,”—he hesitated, fearing it would pain her—“not even when—when you left me. I wish you to know that—I think it only fair to myself that you should understand that never for an instant has there been a diminution of my affection for you. Nothing that has happened has influenced it in the slightest degree. And having said this once, I never will allude to the subject again. Grace, my darling! will you be my wife?”

All the time Mr. Painter was pleading his cause with the best eloquence at his—or at any other person’s command—namely,

the eloquence of the heart, this terrible "refrain" was ringing in her ears.

"*Is it true Mr. Painter wants to marry you?*" *He* had heard it too, and now he was asking her to marry him; probably in consequence of what the child had said. Had she been calm enough to collect her thoughts, she would, of course, have seen the utter absurdity of supposing that a man who had loved her for so many years, and had once already asked her to be his wife, would be influenced by the innocent and unmeaning prattle of a child.

But Grace was at that moment the reverse of calm. She was utterly confused, and so bewildered and ashamed, that she really was not accountable for her actions.

And so it came to pass that, in answer to Mr. Painter's passionate pleading, she drew her hand away from his, and shook her head.

She knew that she loved him with her whole heart; but he had as good as been *asked* to marry her—therefore, she must refuse him.

Mr. Painter saw in an instant “how the land lay.” He had seen Grace’s very natural distress at the child’s abrupt and unlooked-for question; and so far, Grace was right in the letter though not in the spirit. It *was* in consequence of this remark that he was then pleading his cause with her. Not another moment would he lose, when he saw how confused and annoyed she looked.

And therefore, Mr. Painter seeing, as I have said, “how the land lay,” took heart of grace—which is not intended for a pun—and set himself to work to counteract the evil influence of that unlucky infantine interrogatory.

“Grace, wont you answer me?” he pleaded, regaining possession of her hand.

"I cannot be your wife," she whispered.

"Why not? don't you love me? can't you love me? oh, my darling! my darling! you will not be so cruel as to say you cannot love me?"

"I cannot be your wife," she repeated, the tears running down her hot cheeks, and her whole frame trembling nervously.

But she did not say "I cannot love you," which Mr. Painter was sharp enough to observe.

Now then for the *coup d'état*.

"At least you will let me put that ring on your finger, Grace, dear?"

"Oh, yes!" said the unsuspecting Grace, quite relieved at the prospect of a diversion from the present attack; nevertheless, not a little astonished at the sudden change in her lover's request, and the very inferior nature of the favour he solicited—"was he going to be satisfied with *that*, after all?"

And so, with great alacrity, Grace produced her birthday gift, and with equal alacrity Mr. Painter slipped it upon the third finger of her left hand.

And now he seats himself by the side of his lady-love, and says quietly—“Grace, dear, look at your ring.”

And his “lady-love” is decidedly *not* mistress of the situation. In fact, she does not know what to make of it. She loves Mr. Painter; but, she has told him twice that she cannot be his wife. Mr. Painter loves her—but, having been told that she cannot be his wife, he asks leave to place an unmeaning ring upon her finger, and appears perfectly satisfied with permission to do so. “Look at your ring.” What did it all mean? Was he making her a birthday present or an offer of marriage?

So she looked at her ring.

"It is very pretty," she said, not knowing what else to say.

"I am glad you think it pretty. Can you read what the diamonds say?"

"What the diamonds say?" said Grace, examining the diminutive brilliants attentively.

How eagerly Mr. Painter watched her face! For a moment there was no change upon it, then suddenly she looked up, and as her eyes met his, a burning blush deepened and deepened over face and brow. No need for further words or explanation, no use in further resistance—a mine had been sprung which blew the citadel to atoms. The fortress was taken by storm; peace was proclaimed, and ratified by a succession of salutes from the conqueror, most gratifying we feel assured to the conquered.

When Grace appeared at luncheon, Cecil observed that she had the ring on her

finger, and was evidently perfectly acquainted with its true meaning. Never was there a happier termination to a birthday.

“I told you so, Cecil,” said Mr. Painter, triumphantly. “I told you more than six years ago that, sooner or later, Grace would be my wife.”

“You did,” replied Cecil, “and at one time never was a prophecy less likely of fulfilment. Oh! it is a true saying indeed, the evidences of its truth are of almost daily occurrence, and yet how the warning is thrown away upon us!—how little in reality we trust in God, how much in ourselves!”

“What warning, what saying do you mean, Cecil?”

“This,” said Cecil, gravely,—“‘*L’homme propose, mais Dieu dispose.*’”



CHAPTER X.

CONCLUSION.

HE tale is told ; but in the last records of Hollowhill, written evidently several years after the marriage of Grace, I find the following further particulars regarding certain characters in the story, with which characters you, kind reader, have, I trust, become sufficiently interested to consider worthy your attention.

I find that Dame Dorothy—industrious, indefatigable, and managing as ever—was still in the enjoyment of her usual health and spirits, though her hair was white, her cheeks were rosy, her voice was clear, and

her eyes were bright. Ay, and she had a sly bit of humour still for Cecil and Grace when they looked in of a summer's evening to have a chat about old times; for years had softened the pain caused by the sad fate of Charley Dimdale, and if not often alluded to it does not seem to have been altogether "*tabooed*."

Grace had indeed owned to her husband that he had interpreted her feelings towards Charley more correctly than she herself had done. "I was such a mere girl at that time," she said, "and girls are so foolish." Not a complimentary remark towards the youth of her own sex; but I feel that it would be rude to contradict her, acknowledging, as I willingly do, that she certainly ought to know best.

Rupert and Mr. Painter were also frequent visitors at Hollowhill; and many a laugh was raised at the recollection of

Cecil's "dressing up," as they called it, and her encounter with the Cuffs in the Cliff Cottage. "I believe you knocked poor Bob Cuff down, Cecil, when he put his paws on you. I always thought so," Rupert would say. Ah! he was "poor" Bob Cuff now; he had drunk himself to death several years before, and his brother Thomas—Thomas of the hard head—was hastening after him: "took too many hairs of the dog as bit him," Dirge Loafer curtly remarked.

Richard Danger—looking still less like the Dick Danger of old, who had ridden for and won the Farmers' Cup at Dummer races—had become sadly rheumatic, and could do little else than sit by the chimney-corner and smoke or doze away his time. Ay, even in the best parlour now! No man ever had a more tender or a more capable nurse than had Richard Danger. Some one has said, "Once a man, twice a

child ;" and in this, his second childhood, his wife became a mother to him, soothing his pain and cheering his spirits, as only a loving woman can soothe and cheer the helpless and the aged.

Jane Danger, having vainly striven to seduce Mr. Painter from his prophetic visions of Grace, was thoroughly disgusted when she heard of their re-engagement, and declared that "she considered Mr. Painter a poor mean-spirited creature, taking Grace at second-hand." Jane was equally unsuccessful in her attempts upon Mr. Acre; and she eventually punished the obdurate men—so blind to their own interests—by running away with a strolling player, who first burst upon her admiring eyes, all spangles and sparkles, on the stage at Dummer. Now, although Viscount Fitz Fluster was decidedly a spendthrift, and a scamp, not to say a ruffian, upon the stage of Dummer; on the

stage of life—in the character of John Cheek—he was an industrious, prudent, sensible man. He guessed, and he guessed rightly, that Jane Danger, the only daughter of the well-to-do farmer of Hollowhill, would be by no means a bad “spec,” even for the manager of a strolling theatrical company. “She hasn’t got much beauty,” said Mr. Cheek to his friend the clown; who instantly replied, “No more have you.” For this particular clown was not like other clowns, if, as we are told, they are invariably stupid and miserable off the stage. Mr. Cheek’s clown was just as jolly off as he was on the stage, and so he said “No more are you.” Mr. Cheek ignored the observation, and finished his sentence. “But she has what’s better than beauty—she has tin, and plenty of it. What do you say to that, Tom?”

“I say, go in and win, guv’ner—you

two will do slappin'! for if she has tin, and plenty of it, you have brass, and plenty of it, and the two together are bound to make gold."

And so Mr. Cheek did go in and win.

Dame Dorothy took the matter of the elopement very philosophically. "How ever any man could be fool enough to run away with Jane, surprises me! To be sure he did not know much about her. She says he is kind to her, and lets her have her own way, which is a slap at me, as knew better, I hope. But as she *is* happy, why, I can't say but I'm glad she is gone. She never did a thing as was useful, and was allus a hindrance in the house."

Jane's fortune was duly paid; and Mr. Cheek became the lessee of a minor theatre in London.

Mr. Acre had turned his back upon his benighted parishioners, and had left the

neighbourhood; but not before he had succeeded, by his ever-increasing ritualistic practices, in emptying his own church, and in laying the foundations of two Dissenting chapels.

It was rumoured that he had gone to a well-known maritime town—even then famous for its ritualistic proclivities—where he had been received with open arms.

“And they ought to have had broomsticks in them,” said Dame Dorothy, when told the story, laughing heartily, as she always did at the recollection of the encounter between Mr. Acre and Bessy Loafer.

We also find in the records Dame Dorothy’s final opinion of Mr. Acre and his doings—an opinion, I venture to affirm, characterized by sound sense and excellent judgment, for the possession of

which Dame Dorothy was universally accredited by all who knew her. Here is the good Dame's "dictum":—

"The fault I find with Mr. Acre is, that he has no regard to the feelings of others, nor to their opinions, nor to nothing they do or say—in the way of religion, I mean. I don't see what right a parson has to dress himself up like a Merry Andrew, and poke himself about with his fingers, and bob his head everlastinglly, and sing-song the service like a ballad-singer in the street, if his parishioners don't like it. But Mr. Acre, he forces these outlandish customs—heathenish, I call them—down our throats—'willy-nilly,' as I say. And what's the consequence? Why, he has to preach to empty benches. *I* don't call such conduct right conduct on the part of God's minister, whatever others may call it. It ain't his business to affront and disgust his

congregation by dressing his church up like a playhouse, and himself like a mountebank!—leastwise not according to *my* notions of duty to God and to our neighbours. The very last time I went to Dummer Church—'twas on Christmas-day—I thought I must have made a mistake, and somehow got into a theayter. The whole church was hung from roof to floor with a parcel of flaunting, tawdry flags all over tin and tinsel, and the walls of the poor old church was plastered with great staring strips of paper—scrolls they called them—with texts upon them; but there wasn't one of the texts as I didn't know by heart, for they all come out of the Bible; so what was the use of sticking them up there? And such colours too! Lor a massy! such greens and yellows and crimsons! enough to blind you!

“And then I was a'most pisoned by the

smell of the incense, as they called it, which come from a parcel of brass kettles and pots, that half a dozen boys, in their shirts, were swinging to and fro. As soon as ever I had breath enough to move, out I walked. I could no more have knelt down and said my prayers amongst all that row and rubbish, than I could have knelt down to say 'em in a booth at a fair. And when I asks myself 'who it is as has introduced all this trash and tinsel and Popish mummery into our simple and beautiful service? I feel—I feel as though I'd like to have Bessy Loafer's broomstick in my hand, and my gentleman within reach of it! 'If we are,' says I, 'to have all our notions of a decent religious service turned topsy-turvy, let it be, at all events, by some one of known ability, of superior intellect; not by a soft, like that Acre.' Why, Rupert Vicars told me himself—and he was at Oxford with him—that Bob

Acre, as he calls him—whatever he calls him ‘Bob’ for—was that stupid that it was all he could do to scramble through his degree; and yet this ignoramus is to come down here, turning our church into a playhouse, and our beautiful Church Service into Popish mummery, without ‘by your leave, or with your leave!’ But it’s just like ‘em. They are all tarred with the same brush—these rivilistic gentlemen. Mr. Acre isn’t the first of ‘em I’ve seen—they are all eaten up with conceit and vanity. No one knows anything but themselves—that’s *their* creed. They’re as pig-headed as ploughboys; for ignorance and obstinacy allus goes hand-in-hand. I’ve called their antics in church ‘Popish mummery;’ and good reason I have for saying so: for when Patrick Doyle, that’s Kattern’s first cousin, who is a Roman Catholic, come down to see her last summer, he went to Dummer Church, ‘just to see what it

was like,' says he. 'Well,' says I, when he come back, 'what do you think of the service, Mr. Doyle?' 'I liked it very well,' says he, 'and only that it was in English instead of Latin, I wouldn't have known I wasn't in *one of our own churches*.* It's a shame and a disgrace to our religion that such doings should be tolerated. If Mr. Acre is a Roman, why hasn't he the honesty to say so, and go over to the Romish Church? What business has he with a Protestant parish, and a Protestant living, when he turns a Protestant church into a Roman Catholic chapel? It's downright swindling—that's what I call it."

To any who may take exception to the strength of Dame Dorothy's remarks touching ritualistic practices, I would bid them remember that Dame Dorothy was

* A fact.

born long before either "High Church" or "Low Church" had arisen in the land; before the empty forms and ceremonies of the one, or the irreverent absence of all forms in the other, had succeeded in introducing the elements of discord and the bitterness of controversy—upon subjects in nowise affecting our salvation—into the simple faith and the pure worship of God, bequeathed to us by men whose abilities and intelligence were as superior to the present innovators upon our faith and our worship, as light is to darkness. It is not therefore to be wondered at, that Dame Dorothy, with her uncompromising character, should feel and should speak strongly, anent the vagaries of the Acre school. In fact, ignorance cannot be influenced through the usual channels of common-sense and reason. These qualities are non-conductors, are altogether useless as

mediums in any attempt to convey to ignorance the few ideas she may be capable of entertaining. Ignorance must therefore be appealed to through the imagination and the senses. This universally accepted axiom was, no doubt, the primary cause for the introduction of lighted candles, gorgeous vestments, and the childish paraphernalia of a silly ritual, these accessories being the natural accompaniments of a weak intelligence and dull perceptions.

I also find in the records that Catherine Holder, née Doyle, was housekeeper at the Rookery, in the place of Mrs. Bliss, deceased; and that Mr. Holder was butler, vice Doyle, superannuated. Poor old Larry was feeble in body and bent with age; but his intellect was clear, and his spirits as buoyant as ever. He was very proud of his daughter, and well he might be, for a better daughter or a handsomer, more

stately housekeeper you "wouldn't see in a summer day's walk," as Larry would say. Yet the dignified Mrs. Holder had a smack of Catherine Doyle in her still; the joyous laugh, the ready wit, though somewhat subdued, were still part and parcel of her happy, careless Irish nature. And she had yet another characteristic of the Irish-woman, in her love for her father.

Although no longer butler, Larry still lived in the house, still frequented "the room," where he was tenderly and carefully waited upon by Catherine. She never seemed tired of listening to his oft-told stories of years gone by. "How Mrs. Bliss used to fall asleep a'most with the bit in her mouth, the craythur!" and how "that Bounce would divart him with her consate and impidence." There was one story of which Larry was especially fond, one that was always listened to by Cathe-

rine with apparent relish, because it gave pleasure to the old man in the relation.

“Did I iver tell you how that Bounce onst throwed a mug o’ beer into Mrs. Bliss’s lap, Kate?” he would ask.

“You might, father; but I’d like to hear it again, anny way; how was it at all?”

Kindly joyous natures! It does one good to think upon them. It does one good to see old age reverenced and cared for, for old age is commonly the reverse of fascinating—nay, it is often repulsive and not seldom exacting; and although Catherine did no more than her duty by her father, it was a duty that required a gentle, patient, loving spirit to perform. No hasty, no unkind word ever passed Catherine Holder’s lips towards her aged parent.

Lady Jane had in a great degree recovered her health and spirits, and em-

ployed herself chiefly in petting and spoiling Cecil's and Grace's children.

The last mention in the records of "that Bounce" was in a letter from Grace to Cecil, written at St. Helen's, whither she, her husband, and their three children had gone for change of air.

"Whom do you think I saw at the convent here the other day, Cecil? You would never guess, so I might as well tell you at once. Who but 'that Bounce,' as old Larry calls her. It's a fact, I assure you. Mrs. Bounce—Bounce no longer—is a Sister of Mercy, and answers to the name of 'Sister Agnes.' I talked to her for some time, and I am sorry to say I was *not* impressed with the sincerity of her conversion. She spoke so bitterly of the world—especially of the male portion of creation—men were so 'heartless and so deceitful'—that I could not but believe that

‘the grapes were sour’ only because they were out of reach. I may do her an injustice—I hope I do.”

“ The devil an injustice !” said Larry, when Catherine, with Cecil’s permission, read the letter to him, tears of laughter running down his aged cheeks ; “ my word for it, if that Bounce could have got a husband we’d niver have heard of ‘Sister Agnes.’ It’s astonishin’ the charm there is inside a convint to them women whose charms have not been thought much of outside that same. Kate, acushla ! I niver see a handsom’ nun, did you ? But I know you didn’t ! Well, well, I’ve hard of many queer things in my time, but that Bounce turning nun bates all !”

THE END.



